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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

"A STRONG RAY OF PHILOSOPHIC LIGHT": THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM ROBERTSON

BY

ANNE SKOCZYLAS (C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1990.

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ABSTRACT

William Robertson was acclaimed by his eighteenth-century contemporaries as a major historian. His books, on Scotland, the reign of Charles V, and America, represented a new level of scholarship in British historiography through their methodology, use of sources, citation of references, and utilitarian philosophy of history. Robertson was a Church of Scotland minister, and the Principal of the University of Edinburgh from 1762 to 1792. His rational, Presbyterian education helped to form his views on history. Robertson was also influenced by the works on socio-economic topics of his friends David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and the other *literati* of the Scottish Enlightenment. He formulated a theory of history which emphasised means of subsistence as a basis for the changing modes of communal living. His works endorsed eighteenth-century commercial civilization as a well-spring of liberty, intellectual energy and ethical values, and also showed a sensitivity to different cultures and a growing appreciation of the contribution of the individual to the total pattern of history. Robertson's skill as a historian, and his literary and critical discernment, enabled him to create readable and scholarly books which placed the Scottish "science of man" in a historical context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> On this interesting subject, the progress of society in Europe, a strong ray of philosophic light has broken from Scotland in our own times: and it is with private, as well as public regard, that I repeat the names of Hume, Robertson, and Adam Smith.[1]

Edward Gibbon voiced the sentiments of his contemporaries throughout Europe in paying this tribute to Scottish intellectual achievements. The three names thus linked together, however, shared more than merely public acclaim and personal friendship. They were all propagators of a new spirit of sociological interest in man: his relationship with society, his progress of civilization and his mode of subsistence. The enormous creative talents of David Hume and Adam Smith in their fields of philosophy and economics have ensured that their work is still studied and discussed today. Time has been less kind to William Robertson, an outstanding historian who expanded the range of historiography in Britain.

The great admiration in which Robertson was held by his peers was well-deserved. With dedicated detachment, Robertson surveyed the foundation of the modern constitution of his own country and then the growth of the European state system in the sixteenth century. Robertson's analysis of the formation of modern European politics, and his inquiries into the process by which human society evolved from a simple,

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[1]Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2 vols., The Modern Library (New York: n.d.), 2:1145 n.72.

propertyless state to a complicated, commercial organization, were justly praised in his day, and merit examination now. He completed his life's work by researching the discovery of the New World, and studying the trading patterns of Europe with India. His belief in the importance of the historian's task induced Robertson to prepare himself carefully for his work. He honed his literary skills by studying the Classics and English fiction; he engaged in massive amounts of documentary and secondary research; and, above all, he developed a new form of philosophical-conjectural history from studying the socio-economic theories propounded by his friends.

William Robertson was born on 19 September 1721, in the manse at Borthwick, Midlothian, Scotland, the son of the Reverend William Robertson and his wife, Eleanor Pitcairn. The Robertsons were originally from Gladney, Fife, and had the reputation of being a strong, close-knit and intelligent family. In his memoir of Andrew Dalzel[2], who married into the clan, Cosmo Innes[3] spoke of the Robertsons as "that 'cousinship' which has produced a great number of men of talent, even of genius, and some, of . . . rare business

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[2]Andrew Dalzel (1742-1806). author and Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University. Dalzel was married to Mary Drysdale, the daughter of Robertson's cousin, Mary Adam, and her husband, Dr. John Drysdale.

[3]Cosmo Innes (1796-1874), Scottish lawyer and antiquary. Professor of Constitutional Law and History at Edinburgh University, 1846-1874.

capacity."[4] The architect brothers, Robert and James Adam, were first cousins of William Robertson, sons of his father's sister, Mary.[5]

Young William was educated at the parochial school at Borthwick, and at Dalkeith Grammar School. When, in 1733, the elder Robertson was transferred to an Edinburgh parish, William entered university there. He was fortunate to arrive at Edinburgh University at a time of considerable academic stimulation, and to enjoy some outstanding teachers.[6] Many years later, as Principal, he acknowledged his debt to one of them, Dr. John Stevenson, in an eloquent Latin address to the current students of Stevenson's logic class.[7] He spent several years completing his education, being ill for part of one session. Alexander Carlyle[8] became friendly with him

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[4]Andrew Dalzel, *History of the University of Edinburgh from its Foundation*, with a Memoir of the author by Cosmo Innes, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1862), 1:60.

[5]Robert (1728-1792) and James (1730-1794) Adam were the sons of a Scottish builder and architect, William, and his wife, Mary Robertson. After study in Italy, the brothers gained professional acclaim in England.

[6]Dugald Stewart, "Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson, D.D." in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart, Esq., F.R.SS.*, 11 vols. (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable & Co., 1858. Reprint, Farnborough, Hants: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1971). 10:103-5.
Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), Scottish philosopher, professor, and biographer. A student of Reid, he taught Scottish Common Sense philosophy at the University of Edinburgh.

[7]Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:268.

[8]Alexander Carlyle (1722-1805), parish minister at Inveresk, Midlothian, for nearly fifty years. Author of *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*.

while he was recuperating:

> One of the Years too he was siez'd with a Fever, which was Dangerous, and Confin'd him for the greatest part of the Winter. I went to see him sometimes when he was Recovering.[9]

The course of studies for the first years of university was one appropriate for such youthful students. Many of the sons of the gentry never graduated, but left when their parents felt that they had matured. Boys who would have to earn their livings, however, entered professional programmes on completion of the general curriculum. Carlyle recalled attending Divinity classes at Edinburgh in 1739-1740 with a distinguished group including Hugh Blair[10], Hew Bannatine[11], John Jardine[12], John Home[13], William Wilkie[14] and William Robertson. It is perhaps noteworthy in view of the disparate interests which these men pursued that Carlyle wrote that "the

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[9]Alexander Carlyle, *Anecdotes and Characters of the Times*, edited by James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 24.

[10]Hugh Blair (1718-1800), minister, literary critic and professor at Edinburgh University.

[11]Hew (or Hugh) Bannatine (?-1769), minister of Ormiston 1747-1749, thereafter of Dirleton.

[12]John Jardine (1716-1766), Scottish minister, involved in Edinburgh political 'management'. Carlyle said of him that he was "a Great Support to Robertson and our Friends in the Management of Ecclesiastical affairs, as he was the Son in Law of Provost Drummond and kept him Steady, who had been bred in the Bosom of the High Flyers." Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 240.

[13]John Home (1722-1808), Scottish minister and playwright. He resigned his living in 1757 after the success of Douglas.

[14]William Wilkie (1721-1772), Scottish minister, professor, and poet.

Professor of Theology was Dull and Dutch, and prolix".[15] This, according to Carlyle, accounted for the fact that the opinions of the whole group were more liberal than those which were the normal result of an education in Divinity. Robertson was conscious even as a young man that he needed to cultivate verbal skills to be an effective preacher, and to participate in the administration of his church. A decade later, in his *History of Scotland*, he wrote that the members of the fifteenth century Scottish parliament were "strangers to the talents which make a figure in debate" (3:23),[16] and as a result they were held in low esteem and were under royal control. He was resolved to avoid this error. His fellow students shared Robertson's determination to rise in their professions. They formed a debating society, "where their object was to cultivate the study of elocution, and to prepare themselves, by the habits of extemporary discussion and debate, for conducting the business of popular assemblies."[17] This group contained several men who formed lifelong friendships with Robertson and were fellow-members of later

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[15]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 30.

[16]All quotations in the text from William Robertson's histories are from *The Historical Works of William Robertson, D.D., F.R.S.E.*. 3 vols. (London: Jones & Company, 1826-1828). In this edition, vol.1 is the *History of America*, vol.2 is the *History of Charles V*, and vol.3 contains both the *History of Scotland* and the *Historical Disquisition on India*. Because of the pagination of vol.3, references to the *Historical Disquisition on India* have the word India before the page number.

[17]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:107.

clubs. Good conversation was the cement of all the social relationships of these young men. Carlyle recalled that his acquaintance with Robertson began in 1737, "when in his Conversation one could perceive the Opening Dawn of the Day which afterwards Shone so Bright".[18]

In 1741, Robertson was licensed to preach, which meant that he was eligible to be ordained when a church became available. Many young aspirants to the ministry spent years awaiting a "call" to a parish, working as tutors or teachers in the meanwhile.[19] Robertson was fortunate in his connections; in 1743 the Earl of Hopetoun presented him to the living of Gladsmuir, in East Lothian, in succession to his uncle, Andrew Robertson.[20] Robertson's whole career was largely dependent on patronage, as were the careers of most of his contemporaries, who became the leaders of the Moderate group in Church government.

Situated at Gladsmuir, within easy riding distance of Edinburgh, Robertson established the routine which was to continue for the rest of his life. Mornings of study, afternoons of professional activity and evenings of convivial

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[18]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 24.

[19]Carlyle said of this period that, "Preferment is so Difficult to be Obtain'd in our Church, and so triffling [*sic*] when you have obtain'd it, that it requires Great Energy of Mind, Not to fall asleep when you are Fix'd in a Country charge." *Ibid.*, 104.

[20]Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiæ Scoticanæ*, 8 vols. (1866-1871, revised, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1915-1930), 1:366.

conversation comprised the pattern of his days.[21] Trips to Edinburgh were not unusual, and even when at home, friendships were maintained. Carlyle, at Inveresk, remembered his professional neighbours in the forties:

> Hew Bannatine had been ordain'd Minister of Ormiston, who was a first rate Man, for sound understanding and Classical Learning, Robertson was at Gladsmuir, and in Jan^{y} 1747, John Home was Settled at Athelstaneford: So that I had Neighbours and Companions of the first Rank in point of Mind and Erudition.[22]

Apart from a brief excursion in 1745 to join the Edinburgh Volunteers,[23] a band recruited to serve against the army of Prince Charles Stuart, Robertson's life was thereafter centred on parish service, whatever other occupations he enjoyed.

In late 1745, both of Robertson's parents died suddenly, and he was faced with the responsibility of caring for the younger members of his family. He became guardian to his six sisters and one brother, who ranged in age from twenty-two to six. He brought them to live at Gladsmuir, devoting himself to their welfare until they were all settled. By 1751, Robertson felt himself free to marry. His bride was a cousin on his mother's side, Mary Nisbet, whose father was an Edinburgh minister. Mary and William had a family of three daughters and three sons, five of whom survived their father.

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[21]Henry Lord Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters and Science who Flourished in the Time of George III* (London: Charles Knight & Co., 1845), 262-263.

[22]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 104.

[23]See below, Chapter 3.

Even in these early years, Robertson began to act on a wider stage. He was first elected to the General Assembly, or supervisory body, of the Church of Scotland in 1746. Although parish clergymen were not normally regular members of the General Assembly, Robertson was a member at least in 1749, 1751 and 1752. During the session of 1751 Robertson led a small but vocal opposition to the prevailing majority. The next spring, the group published their "Reasons of Dissent from the Judgment . . . of the Commission" in which they supported the principle of church patronage on the grounds of obedience to law, and of the importance to society of the order which such obedience provided. From this date on their group, which became known as the Moderate party[24], grew in power while the High-Flying[25], or conservative, evangelical, ministers lost strength in the General Assembly. The word "Moderate" was the name of the group in a political sense. It not necessarily descriptive of their policies, which were sometimes exclusive.

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[24]In 1784 Dalzel wrote of Dr. Drysdale being "the most popular man in the Church of all those on the Moderate side." Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:44.

[25]High Flight was a synonym for enthusiasm. In 1734, Alexander Forbes, a Scottish moralist and mystic, used the expression in a dialogue about reason and spirit. Lucinus asked, "What if this should be called *Enthusiasm*, and a high Flight?" These were obviously dubious epithets. Æmilius reassured him that it had the approval of St. Paul and philosophers, "It is indeed a *high Flight*, if men can get into that true Spirit to see things as they are."
Alexander Forbes, *Essays Moral and Philosophical on Several Subjects* (London: J. Osborn & T. Longman, 1734. Reprint, New York: Garland Publishers, 1970), 82.

The patronage issue was the main focus of debate in the General Assembly for some years. Legally, Scottish ministers were presented to their parishes by lay patrons, although the approval, or "call", of the parishioners was necessary before a presentee could be formally inducted. Some Presbyterians considered that lay patronage was an inappropriate method of filling pulpits. Opposing them were Robertson and many of his peers, whose fear of enthusiasm made them question the intellectual quality of ministers who might be "called" to parishes by unsophisticated congregations, rather than presented by educated patrons. The Moderate group within the Church of Scotland wanted a more open church with less extreme attitudes. This, they believed, would be promoted by ministers who had received a polite, general education alongside the sons of the gentry, and who continued to be appointed by lay patrons. In this way, scholarship would be maintained in the church. Furthermore, a socially polished, educated clergy would allow the church to exert a positive influence on secular affairs. Robertson's own life illustrated the possibilities of such a role.

To Robertson, patronage had the additional significance of providing an assurance that scholarly young ministers would obtain parishes. The careers of the Moderates made it clear that patronage was necessary in the mid-eighteenth century to ensure employment for such young men. The memoirs and correspondence of the period contained many references to

providing suitable posts for ministerial candidates.[26] The enormous social, intellectual and moral influence of the Moderate group in the second half of the century appeared to prove the validity of their viewpoint. That their period of power was short-lived may be attributed to changing factors in the political, economic, and religious environment rather than to any inherent flaws in their logic.[27]

The foundation of the Select Society in 1754 drew together like-minded men to debate social issues, and brought Robertson to the attention of Scots in other professions. The circle of the Edinburgh literati in the mid-eighteenth century was convivial and congenial. The men who met regularly were linked by ties of birth, marriage, and education. It was a

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[26]For a discussion of possible churches for candidates of interest to Hume and Robertson, see R. B. Sher and M. A. Stewart, "William Robertson and David Hume: Three Letters", *Hume Studies* 11 (1985) & *Supplement*, 74-75.
For an approach to Smith on behalf of a minister seeking a university appointment see Adam Smith, *Correspondence of Adam Smith*, edited by Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 87.
For noble patronage apropos his own appointment to Inveresk, see Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 104-105.

[27]By the turn of the century, Lord Cockburn felt that: "The old historical glory had faded; . . . it was chiefly a lower description of men who were tempted to enlist in the ecclesiastical service. . . . Learning and refinement ceased to be expected; and with too few exceptions, vegetating in the manse, and the formal performance of parochial duties, came to be the ultimate object of clerical ambition." Lord Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time, Scottish Classics #1*, (1856. Reprint Edinburgh: Robert Grant & Son, Ltd., 1946), 140.
See also Richard B.Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 318-320.

small, talented, and gregarious group, whose members exchanged ideas and expounded new theories over dinner and claret. It is clear from surviving memoirs that the quality of the intellectual entertainment meant more to all than the quality of the meal. The group enjoyed their evenings at David Hume's home just as much when the fare was "roosted Hen, and Minc'd Collops, and a Bottle of Punch", as they did when Hume could afford "Elegant Dinners . . . and the Best Claret".[28] Edinburgh social life of the 1770s is illustrated by the account given by Boswell of the hospitality extended to Dr. Johnson after his trip to the Hebrides. In nine days, Johnson dined at six different Edinburgh houses, and spent two nights with Lord Elibank[29] in the country. He had supper at four houses, and Boswell entertained parties for him on three other nights. He also breakfasted out three times, and on the days when he breakfasted at Boswell's, "he had, from ten o'clock till one or two, a constant levee of various persons."[30] Robertson was among the dinner hosts, and presumably was present on some of the other occasions. Most of the other hosts were lawyers, professors, or writers. The slower pace of professional life, and the importance of intellectual

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[28]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 141.

[29]Patrick Murray, 5th baron Elibank (1703-1778), Scottish lawyer and wit.

[30]James Boswell, *Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland and Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.*, edited by R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1924. Reprint 1965), 427.

contact was clear from all reports of such social affairs, as was the amazing mental stamina of the participants, most especially Johnson, who was on public display at all these events.

Further opportunities for the exchange of views arose in the dining clubs which the group around Robertson founded and supported. For the General Assembly of 1756, Carlyle described the decision to patronise the Carriers Inn the landlord of which was told "to lay in 12 Doz. of the same Claret, then 18/- pr Dozen . . . for in his House we propos'd to make our Assembly Parties." "The Snug Parties of our own Friends," however, became known and joined by others, "and no wonder, when the Company Consisted of Robertson and Home and Ferguson[31] and Jardine and Wilkie with the addition of Dav[d]. H[u]me, and L[d] Elibank and the Master of Ross[32] and Sir Gilbert Elliot[33]".[34] Even when in London for a few weeks, the friends formed such a club.[35]

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[31]Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), Scottish minister, philosopher and professor. Chaplain to the Black Watch, 1745-54. Professor of Natural Philosophy, Edinburgh, 1759; Professor of Moral Philosophy, 1764.

[32]William, 14th Lord Ross (1712-1754). Master of Ross is a Scots courtesy title denoting the eldest son of a nobleman.

[33]Sir Gilbert Elliot 1722-1777), Scottish politician, said by Robertson to excel in "acuteness of reasoning and practical information." *Dictionary of National Biography*, 6:671.

[34]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 156-7.

[35]*Ibid.*, 172-173.

The standards of conversation and decorum were high. A Stoic outlook on life agreed well with the Scottish personality. Brougham[36] wrote of Robertson, "He held, and rightly held, that men frequent society, not to pour forth their sorrows, or indulge their unwieldy joys, but to instruct, or improve, or amuse each other, by rational and cheerful conversation."[37] These meetings, formal and informal, became vehicles for the discussion of the role of man in society, and the many other areas of political and economic interest that engaged the attention of the Edinburgh literati. The Select Society "was intended for Philosophical Inquiry, and the improvement of the Members in the Art of Speaking."[38] The lists of questions debated by the members proved that nearly three-quarters of the known questions were of "economic-political-social" issues.[39] The debates of the later Poker Club, "that set who associate with David Hume and Robertson",[40] were among the few occasions when the literati

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[36]Henry, Lord Brougham (1778-1868), Robertson's great-nephew. Educated at Edinburgh University, he later became a lawyer, writer, and politician in England.

[37]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 313.

[38]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:203.

[39]Roger L. Emerson, "The Social Composition of Enlightened Scotland: The Select Society of Edinburgh, 1754-1764", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 114 (1973), 295.

[40]James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal 1762-1763*, Yale Editions of the Private Papers of James Boswell, edited by Frederick A. Pottle (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1950. Reprint, 1951), 300.

expressed reservations about the political settlement of 1707. Other groups included the Griskin Club, a 1756 group formed to promote John Homes's play *Douglas*, at a meeting of which Robertson is supposed to have read the part of Lord Randolph; the Oyster Club, of which Smith had been co-founder and to which Robertson belonged; and the Sunday Club, which met on that day at Smith's home.[41] It is clear that whatever discussion of socio-economic subjects took place, Robertson was in a position to hear all sides of the debate and to form his own judgments as to how the acquired knowledge could be woven into his historical writing.

During the years in which Robertson was working on the *History of Scotland*, he was deeply concerned about the status of his country in the Union with England. The climate of opinion of Edinburgh in the aftermath of the 'Forty-Five, was reflected in a verse tragedy, *Douglas*, written by Robertson's close friend, John Home. As Ferguson wrote of the epics of antiquity:

> The passions of the poet pervaded the minds of the people, and the conceptions of men of genius . . . became the incentives of a national spirit.[42]

The play was the result of a resurgence of the powerful force of Scottish cultural nationalism, which many of the Moderate

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[41]Davis D. McElroy, *A Survey of Eighteenth-Century Literary Clubs and Societies* (n.p.: Washington State University Press, 1969), 164-170.

[42]Adam Ferguson, *An Essay in the History of Civil Society, 1767*, edited by Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 77.

group promoted actively. The martial spirit and pride of race shown in the play, which was set in Scotland, motivated the *literati* to sponsor its production. Rejected in London, *Douglas* opened triumphantly in Edinburgh in 1756.[43] The Presbyterian establishment was thunderstruck at ministers becoming involved in the world of the theatre, of which the church disapproved.[44] The ecclesiastical furor aroused by the interest of the circle of patriotic clergymen in the production, brought Robertson to the forefront of church politics. His views on this subject parallelled his reasons for upholding church patronage. He supported a policy of freedom for ministers to attend the theatre, and, by extension, to become part of the expanding Enlightened culture of the upper classes.[45] They could more effectively foster Christian values from a position of intellectual and social equality. His position had additional strength since he himself did not attend the theatre, on account of a promise

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[43]It is interesting to see that even in this, the patronage of Lord Milton and the Duke of Argyll was needed to arrange the performance. Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 157.

[44]Issues which stimulated eighteenth century debate tended to cross national borders. In Calvinist Geneva at this period, all theatre was banned, a fact which d'Alembert had criticised in his article on the city in the *Encyclopédie* in 1755. Rousseau's *Lettre d'Alembert* of 1758 was a reply to this criticism. Rousseau praised the moral virtue of Geneva, free from the theatrical contamination.

[45]See Jeremy J. Cater, "The making of Principal Robertson in 1762", *Scottish Historical Review* 49.1 (1970), 60-84, and James L. McKelvey, "William Robertson and Lord Bute", *Studies in Scottish Literature* 6 (1969), 76-77.

made to his father.[46] The inevitable disapproval of the High-Flyers meant that Robertson had to use all his talents to disarm the opposition and protect his friends' careers. Alexander Carlyle was the target of much of the fire, but was ultimately saved by Robertson's skill in the management of the Assembly, while John Home escaped by resigning his parish, after he had received the appointment of secretary to Lord Bute.[47]

The emotional success of the *Douglas* affair, and the fact that Britain was now at war with France led the friends into their next national foray, the agitation for the creation of a Scottish militia in 1759-1760. In this, Adam Ferguson, the ex-military chaplain, was probably the leader. In 1757, Parliament approved the formation of an English militia. The Scots were concerned at the possible danger to their country of invasion after a French naval squadron had been seen round

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[46]Robertson was quoted as saying, "That promise, which was exacted by the most indulgent of parents, I have hitherto religiously kept; and it is my intention to keep it till the day of my death. I am at the same time free to declare, that I perceive nothing sinful or inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity in writing a tragedy which gives no encouragement to baseness or vice; and that I cannot concur in censuring my brethren for being present at the representation of such a tragedy, from which I was kept back by a promise, which, though sacred to me, is not obligatory on them." (1:xi)

[47]John Stuart, third earl of Bute (1713-1792), tutor to the future George III, a position from which he influenced the prince's views of kingship. As a politician, he had a brief period of power at the beginning of George's reign, 1760-1763. He acted as patron of the arts and benefitted many of his countrymen.

the coast.[48] The *literati* were convinced that the easiest and most effective defence of Lowland Scotland lay in a national militia.[49] Fifteen years earlier, such a trained force might have permitted the defence of Edinburgh against the army of Prince Charles Stuart, now it might repulse a French attack. The lack of trust apparently shown in the refusal to authorize a Scottish militia[50] produced a spate of pamphlet literature and a new Edinburgh club, the nationalistic Poker. In the complicated relationship between the Scots and the English, this issue created further strains, and helped to turn staunch supporters of the Hanoverian settlement, such as Ferguson and Robertson, into proponents of an enhanced role for Scotland in the Union.

A century earlier, James Harrington[51] had written, "If

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[48]Sher, *Church and University*, 227.

[49]They were not universally supported. The lawyer and writer of memoirs, John Ramsey of Ochtertyre (1736-1814), said of the Militia agitation, "What was still more extraordinary, the Scottish philosophers and Jacobites were exceedingly keen for that measure. Though the most sensible part of the gentry did by no means approve a bringing a burden on their country, which the English felt very severely, they were in general passive; while the friends of the bill, who were active bustling men, were indefatigable in procuring instructions to members of Parliament." John Ramsey of Ochtertyre, *Scotland and Scotsmen in the Eighteenth Century*, from the mss. of John Ramsey of Ochtertyre, edited by Alexander Allardyce, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1888, reprint, Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1971), 1:333.

[50]The Scottish Militia Bill was defeated in April, 1760.

[51]James Harrington (1611-1677), English utopian author. His best known work was *Commonwealth of Oceana*, published in 1656.

a people, . . . for the common defence of their liberty and of their livelihood, take their turns upon the guard or in arms, it is the sword of democracy."[52] Adam Ferguson saw a danger to liberty for any people who became unaccustomed to the use of arms[53] He measured the civic virtue of a people by the active exertion of every citizen in the life of the state. A people who allow themselves to be "disarmed . . . . have rested their safety on the pleadings of reason and justice at the tribunal of ambition and of force".[54] John Home, in his plays, praised the virtues of the citizen soldier. In *Agis*, written in the aftermath of the Rebellion in the late 1740s, the patriot warrior is one

> Who fought the field, the soldier of his love
> As of his sacred country: fought to gain,
> With liberty, a rank and place of honour.[55]

Alexander Carlyle published a pamphlet on the subject in January, 1760, with which Robertson "was well pleas'd" and "added a short paragraph".[56] At the end of the same year

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[52]James Harrington, *The Political Works of James Harrington*, edited by J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 847.

[53]Ferguson, 270-271. It might be noted that Sher considers Ferguson's *Essay* to be "sublimated Scots militia propaganda". Sher, *Church and University*, 234.

[54]Ferguson, *Essay*, 271.

[55]John Home, *The Plays of John Home*, edited by James S. Malek, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980). *Agis*, Act II, p.15.

[56]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 203.

Hume anonymously published *Sister Peg*[57] from the text of which the Poker Club, founded in 1762, derived its name.[58] Ferguson later complained that Adam Smith had written against the idea of a militia in the *Wealth of Nations*[59]. Smith's membership in the Poker Club, however, was attested by Carlyle[60]. The words to which Ferguson took exception, in fact, only suggested that with the modern complexity of the art of war, and with the division of labour, a citizen could hardly have time to devote himself to mastering the necessary skills. Smith admitted that if a militia should serve for a continuous period in the field, it would equal a standing army.[61] A Militia Bill was debated again in 1775-1776, and once more defeated; it did not finally pass until nearly the

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[57]David Hume, *Sister Peg. A Pamphlet hitherto unknown by David Hume*. Edited by David R. Raynor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). This pamphlet was assumed to have been the work of Adam Ferguson.

[58]The Poker Club lasted until 1784. Carlyle said that "the Great Object of those meetings was National". Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 282.

[59]Adam Smith, *Correspondence*193-194.
For Smith's positive attitude to militias, see 21-22.

[60]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 215. Smith is #16 in the 1774 list of members.

[61]Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols., edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner; textual editor W. B. Todd, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 2:694-702, (hereafter cited as *WN*). The position which Smith elaborated in *WN* had been first raised by him in his lectures on Jurisprudence, and must consequently have been well known to Robertson and all his friends from around 1750, when he had lectured privately in Edinburgh.

end of the century.

Robertson's views are clear from his support of the Poker Club, and above all from his works. He had absorbed much of Smith's teachings on modern war. Writing of the early sixteenth century, he said,

> War, from a very simple, became a very intricate science; and campaigns grew of course to be more tedious and less decisive. (2:134)

This necessitated the unpopular raising of heavy taxes to support the burden. Robertson's comment can be compared with that of Smith:

> When the art of war too has gradually grown up to be a very intricate and complicated science, when the event of war ceases to be determined, as in the first ages of society, by a single irregular skirmish . . . but . . . is . . . spun out through several different campaigns: . . . it becomes . . . necessary that the publick should maintain those who serve.[62]

One might, on reading these two quotations, remark on the clarity of Robertson's rendering of the thought in contrast to that of Smith. It is also noteworthy, in this context, that the *History of Charles V* was published seven years before the *Wealth of Nations*. The modern use of mercenary troops dated, in Robertson's opinion, from 1445, when Charles VII of France disbanded his feudal army, after which mercenaries became the preferred force of European rulers. Robertson voiced the views of his circle when he condemned mercenaries and praised citizen armies in his books, in spite of contemporary military realities. The eighteenth century gentleman was educated to

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[62] *Ibid.*, 2:695.

consider the art of war as "certainly the noblest of all arts".[63] The actions of Robertson and his group at the time of the 'Forty-Five, and their later militancy over *Douglas* make it clear that they entirely agreed with Smith on this, at one level of their emotions, in spite of the stress that they usually placed on peace. In a passage in the *History of Charles V*, which recalled the words of Ferguson published two years earlier, Robertson wrote of the late Roman Empire,

> The jealousy of despotism had deprived the people of the use of arms; and subjects, oppressed and rendered incapable of defending themselves, had neither spirit not inclination to resist their invaders. (2:9)

Robertson's first individual publication was his 1755 sermon, preached to the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. It was published under the title of *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, and its Connection with the Success of His Religion considered.* This was a historical review of world conditions at the time of the birth of Christ, and was the only one of his sermons to be published. The following year, Robertson was given the presentation to Lady Yester's Chapel in Edinburgh, although, because of a delay in Hugh Blair's translation, he was not inducted until June 1758. He spent some months that spring in London arranging for the publication of the *History of*

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[63] *Ibid.*, 2:697.

Scotland by Hume's publisher, William Strahan[64]. The book was published in 1 February 1759, to considerable acclaim. Immediately prior to that, on 20 October 1758, Adam Smith proposed to the Faculty of Glasgow University that "the Rev. Mr. William Robertson . . . was a person of great worth and learning, and remarkable for his uncommon ability both in speaking and writing," and was thus worthy of an honorary degree.[65] As a result, the Faculty unanimously awarded Robertson the degree of Doctor of Divinity.[66]

Worldly success followed the publication of the *History of Scotland*, and brought with it financial rewards. Robertson was appointed Chaplain of Stirling Castle in April, 1759. In 1761, he was transferred from Lady Yester's Chapel to Old Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, and later that year, he was appointed a royal Chaplain-in- Ordinary for Scotland. When the Principal of Edinburgh University died in 1762, Robertson became his successor. In May 1763 he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly. Because the Principalship carried with it an automatic seat in the General Assembly, Robertson was a member from that year until his retirement in 1780. Finally,

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[64]William Strahan (1715-1785), Scots printer and publisher who had settled in London and published Hume, Robertson, Smith, and Gibbon.

[65]William Robert Scott, *Adam Smith, as Student and Professor* (Glasgow: 1937; Reprints of Economic Classics, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, Publisher, 1965), 184-185.

[66]Robertson is generally said to have also received a D.D. from Edinburgh. See Hew Scott, *Fasti*, 41, and the anonymous biographer in *Works*, 1:xii.

in August 1763 the title of Historiographer Royal for Scotland was revived and bestowed on Robertson, with a salary of £200.[67] During these years Bute proposed that Robertson should write a history of England. In spite of early reservations about competition with Hume, Robertson agreed to commence this project after he had finished the *History of Charles V*. In the event, however, with the influence of Bute gone, and the *History of America* presenting a natural sequel to the life of Charles, the idea of writing on English history was dropped.

The *History of Charles V* was published in 1769, once more to considerable critical applause. Robertson's payment for it, £3,500, was a greater sum than an author had hitherto received.[68] For a few decades such serious historical and speculative books were highly popular, and their authors made a comfortable living from their writing. A century later, Walter Bagehot remarked on that fact that "philosophical merit had therefore then in Scotland an excellent chance of being far better rewarded than it usually is in the world."[69] By 1796, these days were over; that year Dalzel wrote to a

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[67]Sher has calculated that from a 1757 salary of £75, Robertson's income had jumped by 1764 to £500. Sher, *Church and University*, 122-123.

[68]D. B. Horn, "Principal William Robertson, D.D., Historian", *University of Edinburgh Journal* 18 (1956), 161.

[69]Walter Bagehot, *Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, 9 vols., edited by Norman St. John-Stevas (London: The Economist, 1968), 3:90.

correspondent in Germany:

> The war now raging, and the constant agitation in which men's minds are kept by political opinions, are a great hindrance to literary pursuits, and afford little encouragement for the publication of works of utility. . . . The great prices which English booksellers could formerly afford to give to men of ability for new literary works of merit, were a great stimulus to exertion. Hume, Robertson, Smith, and others, made genteel fortunes by the success of their works.[70]

The *History of America* appeared in 1777, to the enthusiasm of Robertson's friends and the general public. Robertson's final work, the *Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* was the result of a reading of the *Memoir on the Map of Hindustan* by Major James Rennell. It was published in 1792, the year in which Robertson resigned from the Principalship because of failing health.

From 1763 to 1780 Robertson served as leader of the moderate party in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. His extraordinary success in influencing the Assembly was due to his persuasive eloquence and political acumen. His friend, John Erskine[71], said:

> His speeches in Church Courts were admired by those whom they did not convince, and acquired and preserved to him an influence over a majority in them, which none before him enjoyed.[72]

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[70]Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:129-130.

[71]John Erskine (1721-1803), minister and theologian. From 1767 he and Robertson were colleagues at Old Greyfriars Church. Their relationship was one of friendly co-operation, in spite of the fact that Erskine was a leading member of the evangelical opposition to Robertson in the General Assembly.

[72]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*. 10:193.

Several of his contemporaries commented on the fact that Robertson tried to bring forward promising young men, and encouraged them to speak in debate. Stewart included testimonials from both Erskine, and the Reverend Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood[73] to this effect. Robertson's willingness to work with the Government managers of Scottish affairs, without being dominated by them was also noted. Moncrieff Wellwood said of this:

> The different men who had the management of Scots affairs uniformly co-operated with him, but though they assisted him, they looked up to *his personal influence* in the Church, which no man in the country believed to be derived from *them*.[74]

Robertson's eminent common sense and ability to judge the temper of debate served him well up to the crisis of the Catholic Relief Bill of 1779. His retirement the next year was perhaps the result of his lack of success on that issue, and his unwillingness to participate in the debates of a body which was no longer compliant to his wishes. His years of power, however, were long remembered. A biographer, writing in 1826, said:

> In such respect are his decisions held, that they still form a sort of common law in the church; and the time which elapsed between his being chosen Principal of the University and his withdrawing from public life, is distinguished by the name of Dr. Robertson's

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[73]Henry Moncreiff Wellwood (1750-1827), eighth baronet of Tullibole, minister of St. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh. Moderator of the General Assembly in 1780.

[74]*Ibid.*, 10:236.

administration.[75]

As Principal of Edinburgh University Robertson was largely responsible for the expansion of its reputation in his time. He strove to ensure that the faculty should consist of scholars who would not only teach well but also provide role models for the students at the college. Adam Ferguson, Hugh Blair and Dugald Stewart taught there during those years. Robertson himself, along with many of his colleagues, provided a residence for young gentlemen who came from other parts of the country, and in this way supervised their studies.[76] His good-humour with the students was unfailing:

> The young Gentlemen who had Liv'd for years in his House Declar'd they never saw him once Ruffled.[77]

Andrew Dalzel, who was Professor of Greek at the time of Robertson, was a good example of the type of teacher Robertson wanted.[78] When Dalzel was seeking election as clerk of the General Assembly in 1788, he gained the support of many of the country voters because,

> Many of the clergy were his old pupils, who owed to him some of the higher feelings which animate the retired scholar. Many others had experienced his

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[75]R. A Davenport, in "Introduction" to *Works*, 1826, 1:lxxiv.

[76]Adam Smith's correspondence provides graphic examples of the serious concern with which a Scots professor regarded this responsibility. Smith, *Correspondence*, 28-38, and other letters to Lord Shelburne.

[77]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 145.

[78]For an estimation by Lord Cockburn of Dalzel as professor, see Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:113-114.

> kindness in receiving poor youths from their parishes, whom he educated free of expense.[79]

A student of the eighties later felt that there was no university "where industry was more general, where reading was more fashionable, where indolence and ignorance were more disreputable."[80]

Books were second only to human resources in importance to a teaching institution. At the beginning of his tenure Robertson established a library fund, to enable the university to increase its limited selection of books. From improving the library, Robertson went on to promote plans for a new university building designed by Robert Adam, and to raise money for its erection. In 1790 Dalzel wrote to a friend, "We expect to be in our new College house in two years. . . . Mr. R. Adam has the conduct of the building, and it will be the prettiest thing in the island."[81] In March 1792, the members of the University Senate, at their Social Convention, moved that Raeburn[82] should paint Robertson's portrait, "particularly [because of] the great attention he has paid to the increase and flourishing state of the Library", the said

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[79]*Ibid.*, 1:75.

[80]*Ibid.*, 1:53.

[81]*Ibid.*, 1:81.

[82]Henry Raeburn (1756-1823), Scottish artist who studied in England and Italy. He set up a portrait studio in Edinburgh in 1787, and was knighted in 1822. His fee for Robertson's portrait was thirty guineas, plus the cost of a frame, making a total of £38, 17s. (Horn, "Principal Robertson", 155)

portrait "to be hung in the Library."[83] With his usual good humour, the ailing Principal thanked the members of Senate for honouring him with the request for a portrait. He would be happy to sit for Raeburn; he hoped that he would have his old face back on display and, "instead of the suspicious yellow, shall present an honest red and white."[84]

That yellow face was a symptom of the jaundice which led to his death on 11 June 1793. Robertson had suffered from various physical problems over the years. As early as 1765, he had told the English antiquary, Dr. Birch[85], that his work on the *History of Charles V* had been interrupted by "bad Health".[86] In February 1788, he commented to Gibbon that "my health, until lately, has been more shattered."[87] By July of the same year, he was thanking Gibbon for the gift of a book, which had been his "chief amusement and consolation" during a "violent fit of deafness".[88] It must have been a particular trial to Robertson to be cut off from the stimulation of

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[83]*Ibid.*, 155.

[84]Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:95.

[85]Thomas Birch (1705-1766?), D.D. University of Aberdeen, 1753, English clergyman and historian.

[86]Isaac D'Israeli, *Miscellanies of Literature* (London: George Routledge & Sons [preface, 1841]), 38.

[87]Edward Gibbon, *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq.*, with occasional notes and narratives by John, Lord Sheffield, 5 vols. (London: John Murray, 1814, reprint New York: AMS Press Inc., 1971), 2:417.

[88]*Ibid.*, 2:424.

conversation in this way, and he referred to his deafness as "that unsocial malady" in the same letter.

After his retirement in 1792 for health reasons, Robertson and his wife moved to Grange House, just outside Edinburgh, where they were enthusiastic hosts to friends, relatives, and children. The children of his two married daughters, and the flourishing careers of his three sons, provided the historian with continuous interest.[89] Lord Cockburn's family was friendly with the Robertsons. He remembered summer days playing at Grange House with Robertson's grandson:

> The Doctor used to assist us in devising schemes to prevent the escape of our rabbits; and sometimes . . . with strict injunctions to us to observe that moderation which Mrs Robertson could never make himself practise, he permitted us to have a pull at his favourite cherry tree.[90]

Robertson appreciated the pleasures which life had provided, in spite of his wife's efforts to restrain him. In Erskine's words, "He enjoyed the bounties of Providence without running into riot."[91] On a less elevated note, Carlyle said much the same, "As he Lov'd a Long Repast as he Call'd it, he was as

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[89]In 1788, Robertson had written to Gibbon mentioning the presence in Switzerland of his youngest son, David, recuperating from a tour of military duty in India. The young soldier was, he said, "sensible, modest, and well-bred, and though no great scholar, he has seen much; having returned from India, where he served last war, by Bassora, Bagdat, Moussul, and Alleppo." Robertson hoped that Gibbon might provide some introductions for David. *Ibid.*, 2:425.

[90]Cockburn, *Memorials*, 39.

[91]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:200.

Ready to Give it at Home, as to Receive it Abroad."[92] Henry Cockburn was observant enough to notice both the fondness for the table, and the frustration of deafness in the old man.

> He struck us boys, even from the side-table, as being evidently fond of a good dinner; at which he sat, with his chin near his plate, intent upon the real business of the occasion. This appearance, however, must have been produced partly by his deafness; because, when his eye told him that there was something interesting, it was delightful to observe the animation with which he instantly applied his trumpet, when, having caught the scent, he followed it up, and was the leader of the pack.[93]

A formal old gentleman, with wig, cocked hat, and ear trumpet, he greeted ladies with courtly bows. He met death placidly, as had his friend David Hume; on seeing the fruit trees in bloom during his final spring, and thinking of the fruit which he had loved, "he alluded, with cheerful composure, to the event which must happen before they came to their maturity, and prevent him who now looked upon the flower from seeing the fruit".[94]

The last years of the century saw the deaths of many of the leaders of the Scottish Enlightenment. Robertson's burial at Greyfriars, attended by dignitaries of Church and University, epitomised the end of the ascendancy of those members of Edinburgh society who had sought the seeds of order and morality. The Scottish Enlightenment is defined by

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[92]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 145.

[93]Cockburn, *Memorials*, 39-40.

[94]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 312.

Richard Sher as "the culture of the *literati* of eighteenth-century Scotland".[95] It was dominated by a small group of men, interconnected by personal friendship, academic background, and scholarly interests.[96] David Hume and William Robertson were both members of the inner circle of *literati* and leaders in the encouragement of enlightened attitudes in cultural and religious matters. These attitudes were neither radical nor subversive; they were expressions of political and ethical opinion based on the existing societal norms. Utility, order, and virtue were the values which the *literati* espoused. In service, the citizen could find the civic purpose which had been lost with the elimination of the Scottish Parliament in the Act of Union of 1707. Wealth and commercial success could be the beneficial results of enterprise provided that the individual adhered to a code of ethics which was articulated by Ferguson and Smith as well as by periodical writers such as Henry Mackenzie in the *Mirror* and the *Lounger*. Modern historians have remarked on the institutionalised nature of the Scottish Enlightenment.[97] The *literati* were for the most part busy men engaged in the professional and administrative life of their country. Their interests were dictated by their experiences; this led to

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[95]Sher, *Church and University*, 8.

[96]Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. Vol 1, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 15.

[97]For example Nicholas Phillipson and Roger L. Emerson.

their profound socio-economic concerns. Emerson has noted the "very substantial stake" that such men had in Scotland.[98] The importance of the discovery of the past to the sociological studies of the present was emphasised in the groups and societies of the literati. These clubs provided an opportunity for political discussion and the emergence of consensus. The cultural nationalism displayed by many members of the group, including in some ways Robertson himself, was counter balanced by the universalist attitudes of Robertson's histories, which stated that man was everywhere alike at different stages of his development.

> In every part of the earth, the progress of man hath been nearly the same; and we can trace him in his career from the rude simplicity of savage life, until he attains the industry, the arts, and the elegance of polished society. (1:86)

Each club meeting or casual gathering of companions formed a forum in which theories were tested and debated. William Robertson was always present, participating with his usual flair, but also digesting the socio-economic opinions being presented. This study investigates the way in which Robertson recast the various aspects of these into material for a theory of history which emphasised means of subsistence as a basis for the changing modes of communal living. This was a theory which, although it endorsed modern commercial civilization as a well-spring of liberty, intellectual energy and ethical values, also showed a sensitivity to different cultures and an

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[98]Emerson, "Social Composition", 312.

appreciation of the contribution of the individual to the total pattern of history.

2 WILLIAM ROBERTSON AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Modern historical writing was born in the eighteenth century, when a deeper desire for knowledge about the past grew up alongside a passionate inquiry into Newtonian inductive science and a fresh curiosity about man's moral sentiments. In Scotland, this interest was particularly keen. In the words of David Hume, "'Tis at least worth while to try if the science of *man* will not admit of the same accuracy which several parts of natural philosophy are found susceptible of."[1] An expanding intellectual world was waiting to be explored. Physicists and philosophers alike submersed themselves in the inquiry into causation; they asked what force motivated the universe and what, if any, divine will directed the actions of men? The two great historians of the Scottish Enlightenment came to different answers to these questions; David Hume, as a young man, arrived at scepticism after great mental stress; his friend, the Presbyterian minister, William Robertson, remained firm in his belief that "the Almighty carries on the government of the Universe, by equal, fixed, and general laws" (2:22-23). A comparison of some of his religious attitudes with those of Edward Gibbon,

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[1]David Hume, *An Abstract of a Book lately Published; entituled [sic] a Treatise of Human Nature, &.* A Pamphlet hitherto Unknown by David Hume, reprinted with an introduction by J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 6.

who was widely accused of being anti-Christian in his approach to Church history, is instructive. Robertson's Christian belief meant that his views were sometimes less cynical than those of his fellow historian, but they were often more demanding. He truly believed that truth "needed only a fair hearing" to prevail (3:30). To Gibbon, on the other hand "truth and reason seldom find so favourable a reception in the world".[2] Both men derided the medieval belief in miracles, but Robertson's condemnation of miracles, especially in judicial cases, had the rational stringency ~~of the~~ Scottish, eighteenth-century, enlightened churchman.

> By attending to these, men were accustomed to believe that the established laws of nature might be violated on the most frivolous occasions, and were taught to look rather for particular and extraordinary acts of power under the divine administration, than to contemplate the regular progress and execution of a general plan. One superstition prepared the way for another. (2:23)

Gibbon, with first hand experience of Catholicism, was much more temperate and accepting.

> The real or imaginary prodigies, of which they so frequently conceived themselves to be the objects, the instruments, or the spectators, very happily disposed them to adopt with the same ease, but with far greater justice, the authentic wonders of the evangelic history; and thus miracles that exceeded not the measure of their own experience inspired them with the most lively assurance of mysteries which were acknowledged to surpass the limits of their understanding.[3]

Philosophical history, as it developed in the eighteenth

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[2]Gibbon, *Decline & Fall*, 1:383.

[3]*Ibid.*, 1:410.

century, has been interpreted in several ways. Historians have agreed that it was intended to secularize men's ideas of society. It attempted to rationalize men's opinions and, through them, the institutions they supported. R. G. Collingwood[4], Peter Gay[5], and Hugh Trevor-Roper[6] have described two strands in Enlightenment history: the idea of the past as having an irrational or organically developed nature which is culturally dependent, illustrated by the writing of Montesquieu; and the idea of a linear progress in the growth of man's facilities of reason, and thence his level of civilization, as propounded by Condorcet[7]. Norman Hampson[8] emphasised the cosmopolitan and universal aspect of Enlightenment thought, which gradually broke down in the last decades of the century. This breakdown brought with it a German-led revolt against the classical values which seemed to have been appropriated by France. Another modern historian,

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[4]R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press Paperback, 1985. Reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 78-81.

[5]Gay, *Enlightenment*, 1:32-38.

[6]Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Historical Philosophy of the Enlightenment", in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 27 (1963), 1670-1671.

[7]Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat, marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), French mathematician, philosopher and politician. An aristocrat who supported the Revolution, he was proscribed in 1793 and wrote his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* while in hiding.

[8]Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 232-250.

Paul Hazard[9] stressed that eighteenth century history had three practical aims: that it should be a scientific examination of evidence, that it should recognise its own limitations, and that it should avoid any suggestion of the supernatural. William Robertson wrote with aims similar to those identified by Hazard. As far as the two strands of thought were concerned, Robertson, as a Christian with a belief in divine Providence, to some extent agreed with the idea of linear progress. He accepted a concept of historical continuity, and at the same time he was universalist in his outlook. He was furthermore influenced by Scottish views on the spontaneous growth of political institutions, and so in him to some extent both strands met.

Eighteenth-century historians were writing a recognised and popular genre of literature with definite goals and parameters. Forms and styles of history were the subject of debate and concern. "Partisan" history had been common in the past hundred years. The Scots felt that British history had hitherto been presented from the viewpoint of one side in any issue for political purposes. As Adam Smith said in one of his lectures in the session of 1762-1763, "It has been the

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[9]Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century from Montesquieu to Lessing*, translated by J. Lewis May (Cleveland: Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company, 1965), 243-248.

fate of all modern histories to be wrote in a party spirit."[10] Hume thought that he was breaking this tradition with his *History of England*, of which the first volume appeared in 1754. In his own words, "I thought that I was the only historian, that had at once neglected present power, interest, and authority, and the cry of popular prejudices."[11]

The "Classical" history was still seen as a model for many writers.[12] Hume reminded Robertson in 1759 of the lasting appeal of Plutarch[13], and went on to say, "Now I would have you think of writing modern lives, somewhat after that manner; not to enter into a detail of the actions, but to mark the manners of the great personages, by domestic stories, by remarkable sayings, and by a general sketch of their lives and adventures."[14] Other contemporaries also believed in the

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[10]Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, edited by J. C. Bryce, general editor, A. S. Skinner, *The Glasgow edition of the works and correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 116 (hereafter cited as *LRBL*).

[11]David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), xxxvii.

[12]Philip Hicks, "Bolingbroke, Clarendon, and the Role of Classical Historian", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20 (1986-7).

[13]Plutarch (c46-c120 AD), Greek author of *Parallel Lives*, in which Greek and Roman politicians and generals are contrasted. Alexander Carlyle compared Robertson and Blair in this way. Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 277-282.

[14]David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., edited by J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932. Reprint, 1969), 1:315-316.

importance of the rules of classical history. Dr. Johnson found grounds for criticism of Robertson in his depiction of long-dead figures whom he could not have known personally:

> Robertson paints; but the misfortune is you are sure he does not know the people whom he paints, so you cannot suppose a likeness. Characters should never be given by an historian unless he knew the people whom he describes or copies from those who knew them.[15]

Adam Smith expected a historian to keep even closer to the classical pattern of Thucydides, and stated that, "The describing of characters is no essentiall part of a historical narration."[16] Diversions from strict narrative were also frowned on. Smith considered that "the Dissertations" found in modern histories rendered them "less interesting than those wrote by the Antients."[17] John Wesley[18] had similar expectations. Of the *History of America*, he noted its "intolerable prolixity" and added "the dissertations are sensible, but they have lost their way; they are not history; and they are swelled beyond all proportion."[19] Adam Ferguson, on the contrary, felt that Robertson had indeed

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[15]James Boswell, *Laird of Auchinleck 1778-1782*, edited by Joseph W. Reid and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1977), 141.

[16]Smith, *LRBL.*, 94.

[17]*Ibid.*, 102.

[18]John Wesley (1703-1791), English clergyman who founded Methodism.

[19]John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 6:326.

carried on the classical tradition. In 1814, writing to the Principal's son, Lord Robertson[20], he said, "More fortunate than Tacitus or Livy, his works entire remain for ages indefinite, to show that in his time the British style in able hands was fit to emulate or cope with theirs."[21]

"Erudite" history, the careful collections of facts and documents, still had appeal in many circles. To Robertson, these writers possessed too narrow a sense of history. "Nothing is more common among Antiquaries, and there is not a more copious source of error, than to decide concerning the institutions and manners of past ages, by the forms and ideas which prevail in their own times" (2:424). Robertson's intention was to expand and re-invigorate the erudite approach by integrating it with the new philosophical methods which had been developed in France. He intended to use primary sources for his facts wherever possible, and to allow his readers to deduce what actually happened from the information which he would present. He believed that in this way he would present a true picture of the past. Writing to Dr. Birch, in 1757, Robertson spoke of his aims in writing the *History of Scotland*:

> My chief object is to adorn . . . the history of a period, which . . . deserves to be better known. But as elegance of composition . . . is but a trivial

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[20]William Robertson (1753-1835), lawyer, elevated to the Scottish bench as Lord Robertson in 1805. Acted as his father's literary executor.

[21]Quoted in Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 320.

> merit without historical truth and accuracy, and as the prejudices and rage of factions . . . have rendered almost every fact . . . a matter of doubt or of controversy, I have therefore taken . . . pains . . . to examine the evidence on both sides with exactness.[22]

The giant figures of Montesquieu and Voltaire are seen by most historiographers as towering over the disciples who followed them. The English Channel, however, had influential winds which blew in both directions. Both great Frenchmen visited England in the early decades of the eighteenth century and were strongly influenced by the political and commercial systems which they saw in action. Whether or not they fully understood the complexities of British government, they were certainly conscious of the greater openness of British society, of the general educated interest in science and the arts, and of a tolerant and relatively balanced form of government. This knowledge powered many of their later speculations into the governing spirit of nations. It also strengthened their interest in philosophical history. In the latter half of the century, the Scottish literati had studied their works, but they were by no means their blind disciples. Schlenke[23], in recent years has cautioned his readers against seeing all other historians as members of the "School of Voltaire". Robertson admired both writers for the bold new

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[22]D'Israeli, *Miscellanies*, 36.

[23]Manfred Schlenke, "Aus der Frühzeit des englischen Historismus. William Robertsons Beitrag sur methodischen Grundlegung der Geschichtswissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert", *Saeculum* 7 (1956), 107-125.

paths which they had marked out for historians. As a scholar, however, he had problems with their methodology. He commented of Montesquieu that "the passion of that great man for system sometimes rendered him inattentive to research; and from his capacity to refine, he was apt, in some instances, to overlook obvious and just causes" (1:370). Voltaire was to Robertson "that extraordinary man, whose genius no less enterprising than universal, has attempted almost every different species of literary composition." Unfortunately, notable "guide" though he was, Voltaire did not quote his sources. Had he only done so, wrote Robertson, "a great part of my labour would have been unnecessary, and many of his readers, who now consider him only as an entertaining and lively writer, would find that he is a learned and well informed historian" (2:436-437). Robertson was committed as a historian to following the paths of universal history that the French school had charted. He also, however, intended to go beyond these limits and create a mode of his own. His history was philosophical in tone, but securely based on researched facts. Broad though the scope might be, the narration should be meticulously detailed following the information available, and speculation should be kept to a minimum. Causes should be sought out and related to events, but only if there was a clear line of connection.

> Into this boundless field of fancy and conjecture, the historian must make no excursions; to relate real occurrences, and to explain their real causes and effects, is his peculiar and only province. (3:55)

It is the intention of this study to indicate how Robertson's scheme of history writing matured over his active career. Womersley has pointed out that only in Robertson can we find a historian writing in English on more than one subject during the eighteenth century. The inevitable progress which this involved in Robertson's ideas meant that,

> The investigation of history became a quest not only for the truth of what men have done but also for truthful ways of writing about those deeds.[24]

A final word on Robertson's combination of erudition and philosophy to achieve fresh historical insight, may be seen in Meinecke's comment on Robertson's detailed mastery of his material, "There is no mistaking his advance upon Voltaire, who with his smaller knowledge was yet much rasher in his assertions."[25]

In Scotland there was a strong literary historical tradition with its own guidelines developed during the century.[26] Francis Hutcheson[27] had characterised beauty as

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[24]D. J. Womersley, "The Historical Writings of Robertson", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986), 497.

[25]Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism. The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. by J. E. Anderson from 1959 German edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 195.

[26]Roger L. Emerson, "Conjectural History and the Scottish Philosophers", *CHA Historical Papers* (1984), 63-90.

[27]Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), philosopher, born in Ireland, professor at Glasgow University, 1729-1746.

"uniformity amidst variety",[28] and he considered that history demonstrated this:

> There is one sort of beauty . . .the taste or relish of (which) is universal in all nations . . . and that is the beauty of history. . . . The superior pleasure then of history must arise, like that of poetry, from the manners: when we see a character well drawn wherein we find the secret causes of a great diversity of seemingly inconsistent actions; or an interest of state laid open, or an artful view nicely unfolded. Now this reduces the whole to an unity of design.[29]

When Hume and Robertson were writing their histories twenty years later, they tried to follow these principles to create literature which was distinguished in form and content, which would give "superior pleasure" to men and women of taste and discrimination. In his *History of Charles V* Robertson began by tracing the European background from the fall of the Roman Empire to the end of the fifteenth century. In words that bring to mind Hutcheson's idea of unity in diversity, he said:

> For as the institutions and events which I have endeavoured to illustrate, formed the people of Europe to resemble each other, and conducted them from barbarism to refinement in the same path, and by nearly equal steps, there were other circumstances which occasioned a difference in their political establishments, and gave rise to those peculiar modes of government which have produced such variety in the character and genius of nations. (2:44-45)

While Hutcheson was articulating his theories of beauty in history in Glasgow, at Edinburgh University Charles Mackie

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[28]Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning Beauty, Order, Harmony, Design*, edited with an introduction and notes by Peter Kivy (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 41.

[29]*Ibid.*, 78.

was lecturing as the first Professor of Universal History.[30] His classes in both "Roman Antiquities" and Universal History were attended by many members of the rising generation of young Scots, including William Robertson. When one of Mackie's friends wrote to express his pleasure in the fact that "your schools flourish so well . . . as it affords a prospect of the revival, as I may call it, of Letters in our Country,"[31] he probably little realised the accuracy of his prophecy. In 1741, two years after Robertson heard Mackie's lectures[32], the *Scots Magazine* printed a précis of his syllabus. It is worth quoting at length as an illustration of the native tradition on which Robertson built.

> He explains the great revolutions that have happened in the world. After the declension of the Roman Empire in the West, he gives an account of the migrations and settlement of the several nations which overspread that empire, and of the different forms of government by them introduced; upon the ruins of which the present constitutions of most countries in Europe are founded. . . . During the whole course of these lectures, he adduces the authority of the best Historians . . . and . . . refers to remarkable passages in the *Grand Corps Diplomatique, Rymer's Foedara*, . . . He likewise gives an account of the lives of the most celebrated Writers on all subjects, to make his students acquainted with the history of Learning in all ages; and takes occasion to detect many vulgar errors in History.[33]

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[30]L. W. Sharp, "Charles Mackie, the First Professor of History at Edinburgh University", *Scottish Historical Review* 41 (1962), 26. The Chair was founded by Act of the Edinburgh Town Council, 28 August 1719.

[31]*Ibid.*, 29.

[32]Horn, "Principal Robertson", 159.

[33]Sharp, "Charles Mackie", 31.

Sharp concluded his paper on Mackie with the comment that the Professor was a good teacher who felt that his labours were rewarded by the success of his pupils. In Robertson, his history lessons bore remarkable fruit; if the form of Robertson's work had literary origins in Hutcheson or Swift, the content certainly had been suggested as much by Mackie as by Voltaire or Montesquieu.

The Scottish theory of history was strongly influenced by Bolingbroke's theory of utility. "The true drift of study, and the true use of history . . . is a constant improvement in private and in public virtue."[34] The connection between history and philosophy was close: "History is philosophy teaching us by examples how to conduct ourselves in all the situations of private and public life."[35] Thus rules, which could be observed in daily life, were derived from history:

> There are certain general principles, and rules of life and conduct, which always must be true, because they are conformable to the invariable nature of things. He who studies history as he would study philosophy, will soon distinguish and collect them, and by doing so will soon form to himself a general system of ethics and politics on the surest foundations, on the trial of these principles and rules in all ages, and on the confirmation of them by universal experience.[36]

This viewpoint was enthusiastically adopted by the Scottish

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[34]Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, *Letters on the Study and Use of History* (London: A. Millar, 1752), 13-14.

[35]*Ibid.*, 48.

[36]*Ibid.*, 53.

school, so many members of which were clergymen. Robertson's colleague, Dr. Hugh Blair, included it in his lectures to the students at Edinburgh University. The historian, said Blair, must "record truth for the instruction of mankind."[37] Hutcheson's thought was added to this. The subject must have "as much unity as possible" so that the reader can "trace all the secret links of the chain, which binds together remote, and seemingly unconnected, events."[38] For Adam Smith, teaching in Glasgow, as for Hume, writing of the Stuarts, "the chief purpose of History [is] to relate Events and connect them with their causes without becoming a party on either side".[39] Dugald Stewart, in the biography of Robertson which he wrote in 1796, remarked of the *History of Charles V*, "the results (of extensive reading) appear to be arranged in the most distinct and luminous order. At the time when he (Robertson) wrote, such an arrangement of materials was the grand *desideratum*."[40] Since the purpose of history was to instruct, morality was of major importance. The historian "should discover sentiments of respect for virtue, and an indignation to flagrant vice."[41]

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[37]Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London: William Baynes & Son, 1825), 477.

[38]*Ibid.*, 478-479.

[39]Smith, *LRBL*, 115.

[40]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:146.

[41]Blair, *Lectures*, 492.

In dedicating *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* to King George III, Robertson stated:

> History claims it as her prerogative to offer instruction to Kings, as well as to their people. . . . your subjects cannot observe the various calamities which that monarch's ambition . . . brought upon his dominions, . . . without . . . looking up with gratitude to their Sovereign, who . . . possessed . . . such maturity of judgment . . . to prefer the blessings of peace to the splendour of military glory. (2:Dedication)

History as "an object of dignity"[42] could be used to approve royal virtue, as well as reprove royal vice. David Hume had written on the same theme. He mentioned history's value in amusing the fancy, in improving the understanding, and in strengthening virtue. Hume, Blair, and Stewart were as aware as Robertson of the extent to which the historical sense had changed in their lifetimes. Hume spoke of the entertainment derived from observing "human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays towards the arts and sciences"[43] To Blair, it was to M. Voltaire that "we are most indebted" for "a more particular attention than was formerly given to laws, customs, commerce, religion, literature, and every other thing that tends to show the spirit and genius of nations."[44] Stewart likewise ascribed to Voltaire the change in historical style:

It became fashionable, after the example of Voltaire,

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[42] *Ibid.*, 477.

[43] Hume, *Essays*, 565-7.

[44] Blair, *Lectures*, 496.

> to connect with the view of political transactions, an examination of their effects on the manners and condition of mankind, and to blend the lights of philosophy with the appropriate beauties of historical composition.[45]

The new method, however, whether it began with Voltaire, as so many believed, or with Montesquieu, as the themes of Scottish conjectural history might suggest, or whether it was a homegrown plant, seeded perhaps by Hume, but brought to triumphant fruition by Robertson, still emphasised utility and education. The change was clear to the Edinburgh readers of *The Lounger*, who were informed in 1785, that only recently had history changed in breadth. Furthermore, there were still:

> Few historians who have viewed it as their chief business to unfold the more remote and general causes of public events, and have considered the giving an account of the rise, progress, perfection, and decline of government, of manners, of art and of science, as the only true means of rendering History instructive.[46]

Robertson was aware of the potential for criticism of his work by contemporaries of "classical" bent. He foresaw the views of such as Wesley, and tried to disarm these opponents in the preface to *The History of Charles V*. He believed that the importance of his utilitarian purpose justified his abandonment of classical guidelines. Even after deciding to separate the discovery of the New World from his original plan, the work still seemed "too extensive". "But my

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[45]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:168-169.

[46]*The Lounger*, edited by Henry Mackenzie (Edinburgh: William Creech, 1786), 17-18.

conviction of the utility of such a history prompted me to persevere" (2:6).

The new specialist model of history writing pioneered by Robertson was based on this theory of utility. It must, however, be dignified and elegant in style and content, as well as accurate in detail and meticulous in research. Robertson's literary form was clear, interesting and appropriate to his narrative. Each history possessed an obvious unity of theme, while theory, argument and explanation were handled with variety. To the modern mind the passages of introductory exposition to the main themes are the most stimulating, and the most indicative of the impressive learning of the author. How can the Canadian reader not appreciate a writer who says, "Over all the continent of North America, a north-westerly wind and excessive cold are synonymous terms" (1:82)? The long narrative books appear on the surface to be merely chronological accounts of events. Smitten, however, has demonstrated the immensely skillful use of pattern and contrast used by Robertson to create a fiction-conditioned unity of form.[47] According to Lord Brougham, Robertson's narrative style was directly influenced by the fiction of Defoe and Swift. This coherence, based on "analogy and contrast",[48] thus became part of Robertson's contribution

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[47]Jeffrey Smitten, "Robertson's *History of Scotland*: Narrative Structure and the Sense of Reality", *Clio* 11:1 (1981), 29-47.

[48]*Ibid.*, 33.

to the growth of historical narrative.[49]

Robertson's judgments were temperate and restrained, as was his prose style. He was criticised in his own day for being too lenient in his treatment of the genocide committed by the Spaniards in America. Reading the text, however, the full horror of European violence and greed was clear in Robertson's modulated prose. Edward Gibbon commented in his *Memoirs* on the writing of his two British historical predecessors:

> The perfect composition, the nervous language, the well-turned periods of Dr. Robertson inflamed me to the ambitious hope, that I might one day tread in his footsteps: the calm philosophy, the careless inimitable beauties of his friend and rival [Hume] often forced me to close the volume, with a mixed sensation of delight and despair.[50]

It was noted by Oliver in 1947, that Gibbon had indeed trod in Robertson's footsteps.[51] He drew attention to the following quotation from the *History of Charles V*, published in 1769:

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[49]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 304. "He was intimately acquainted with Swift's writings; indeed, he regarded him as eminently skilled in the narrative art. He had the same familiarity with Defoe, and had formed the same high estimate of his historical powers. I know, that when a Professor in another University consulted him on the best discipline for acquiring a good narrative style . . . the remarkable advice he gave him was to read 'Robinson Crusoe' carefully; and when the Professor . . . supposed it was a jest, the historian said he was quite serious: but if 'Robinson Crusoe' would not help him, or he was above studying Defoe, then he recommended 'Gulliver's Travels'."

[50]Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life*, edited from the manuscripts by Georges A. Bonnard (London: Nielson, 1966), 99.

[51]John W. Oliver, William Robertson and Edward Gibbon", *Scottish Historical Review* 26 (1947), 86.

> If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most calamitous and afflicted, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius, the Great, to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy. (2:9-10)

The sense of this was inverted by Gibbon in an early chapter of the *Decline and Fall*, published in 1776, to read:

> If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.[52]

While few would deny Gibbon's greater talents as a writer of English prose, it is interesting to see the extent to which he modelled himself on Robertson.

From these strands of historiographical yarn, Robertson wove the fabric of a new, and, to use one of his favourite words, vigorous history. In this, as the century progressed, he would enshrine much of the socio-economic theory of his friends, as he heard it from their lips, and then studied it in their works. When he wrote on modern commercial practices in Spain in the *History of America*, he was aware of the importance of this new "spirit of philosophical inquiry, which it is the glory of the present age to have turned from frivolous or abstruse speculations to the business and affairs of men" (1:269).

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[52]Gibbon, *Decline & Fall*, 1:70.

3. POLITICS AND BALANCE IN LIFE AND LITERATURE

Moderation, order and balance were the virtues which William Robertson espoused in both life and literature. In his life, as in his writing, he tried to follow the principle of utility, and balance several contrasting interests. Within the limits implied by his belief in the Church of Scotland and in the British constitutional compromise, he tried to be open in his judgements. His moderate politics, sincere nationalism and abhorrence of faction gave him a position of control in the academic and ecclesiastical world of Edinburgh which he used wisely. His professional experience, along with the encouragement and creative assistance which he received from his friends, helped Robertson to explain in his books how political changes happened in history. Contingency had its place, in addition to planned action. Assassinations had to be recorded, but should serve as examples to be avoided:

> History relates these extravagances of the human mind, without pretending to justify, or even to account for them; and regulating her own opinions by the eternal and immutable laws of justice and of virtue, points out such inconsistencies, as features of the age which she describes, and records them for the instruction of ages to come. (3:102)

The law of unintended consequences meant that such events had importance in history; the murder of an apparently insignificant individual could lead to the strengthening of the Reformation in Scotland.

From 1758 until a few months before his death in 1793,

William Robertson lived in Edinburgh and participated actively in the social, religious and academic life of the city. As a provincial capital, Edinburgh, although it was no longer the seat of government, maintained its own law courts, church assembly and university. By and large, the members of the Scottish intelligentsia served professionally in one or more of these bodies, and were thus part of the machinery which set the standards of society. Their social origins and career objectives combined with their improving philosophy to make them supporters of the Union of the Parliaments with England, and the Hanoverian Succession. Their philosophic Whiggism, however, probably played a stronger role than their material ties to the administration in keeping them staunch supporters of the Hanoverian dynasty. Robertson spoke later for many of them when he refused to condemn a man for his Jacobite sympathies.[1]

Back in 1745, however, he and his recently graduated friends had taken to arms personally. They joined a "Corps of 400 Volunteers" to uphold the Government, which they saw as the pillar of the Protestant religion, and of Scottish economic and cultural advancement, against the Catholic clan

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[1]Boswell, *Tour*, 426. Boswell quotes Lord Elibank as saying, "Mr. Robertson, the first thing that gave me a high opinion of you, was your saying in the Select Society, while parties ran high, soon after the year 1745, that you did not think worse of a man's moral character for his having been in rebellion" The earliest date for this statement would be 1754, the year the Society was founded.

feudalism of the Stuart Highland army.[2] John Home's biographer said that he "took the side of whiggism, as whiggism was then understood, and freedom, as British freedom was then conceived".[3] The attempts of the young ministers to see military action were generally unsuccessful, although Home, the most bellicose of the friends, was captured after the Battle of Falkirk, and had the excitement of an escape from Doune Castle in Perthshire. Their lack of actual martial involvement, however, did not lessen the sincere need which they felt to defend their Protestant heritage. A decade later Robertson gave his opinion of the Stuart relationship with the Church of Scotland, an opinion which further explained his determination to support the Presbyterian establishment. "No prince", he wrote in his *History of Scotland*, "was ever less disposed than James [VI] to approve a system, the republican genius of which inspired a passion for liberty extremely repugnant to his exalted notions of royal prerogative"

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[2]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 58-60. Carlyle recalled that his group of University friends volunteered to defend Edinburgh, and to secure "our Country's Laws and Liberties". When the Lord Provost decided not to fight for the capital, the group made a happily alcoholic trip to offer their services to the government commander, Sir John Cope, at Haddington, south of Edinburgh. Carlyle's memories included one of Robertson, who had wisely had a night's sleep at an inn, being "quite Stout and well refreshed" the following day, while the others were "Jaded and undone". The five young men had consumed in the course of an afternoon, a bowl of whiskey punch, a bottle of claret, four bottles of burgundy, and "some beer or Porter"!

[3]Henry Mackenzie, *An Account of the Life and Writings of John Home, Esq.*, (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable & Co., 1822), 5.

(3:203).

His contemporaries frequently commented upon the moderate nature of Robertson's political principles. To Brougham, they were those of "a moderate Whig, a Whig of 1688"[4], and he added a quote from Horace Walpole[5] that Robertson was "a very moderate Whig". By 1862, when Cosmo Innes published his memoir on Andrew Dalzel, Robertson seemed "a Tory", even if he had "called himself a Whig".[6] Robertson disapproved of faction, of excessive influence and of extremity in politics of any kind.[7] Known as a universal conciliator, he believed that consensus could achieve much that was impossible through confrontation. He was a worthy disciple of David Hume in his belief in peaceful methods for political change.[8] This conviction influenced his managerial career in Church and University and coloured his political histories.

Robertson believed that the political and social world of late eighteenth century Britain was the product of progress

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[4]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 315.

[5]Horace Walpole (1717-1797), English author and historian, who helped to popularize the Gothic style.

[6]Innes, in Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:63.

[7]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 117. As early as 1749 Robertson, Carlyle, and two friends agreed not to be dinner guests of parish patrons who had suits being heard at the time of the General Assembly.

[8]"For my part, I shall always be more fond of promoting moderation than zeal. . . . Would men be moderate and consistent, their claims might be admitted; at least might be examined." Hume, *Essays*, 26,30.

brought about with the aid of human reason. In November 1788, he preached a sermon on the centenary of the Glorious Revolution, attended by his great-nephew, Henry Brougham, at the age of ten. His message, as usual in his writings, looked to the example of the past to instruct the future. He anticipated the coming of the French Revolution and rejoiced in the prospect of freedom for "so many millions of so great a nation from the fetters of arbitrary government"[9] Robertson was hopeful for the future of the French nation and had no fears about the outcome of events there. In later years, his son, Lord Robertson, refused to publish the sermon lest its author be taken "for a Jacobin".[10] On the brink of war in 1775, Robertson could write about the American colonies, much though he wished to preserve them for Britain, that, "as a lover of mankind I bewail" any check to their prosperity. He believed that they would one day attain their freedom, while remaining "connected with us by blood, by habit, and by religion"[11] This belief was not unlike Adam Smith's conclusions on the value of colonies. Smith saw them as largely a drain on the public purse; merely a dream which has "amused the people with the imagination that they possessed a great empire on the west side of the Atlantic".[12] From this

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[9]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 270.

[10]*Ibid.*, 271.

[11]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*. 10:160.

[12]Smith, *WN*, 2:946-947.

dream the British should awaken, and, although Smith realised that voluntarily to relinquish colonies was unheard of, such an action would benefit commerce:

> By thus parting good friends, the natural affection of the colonies to the mother country, which, perhaps, our late dissentions have well nigh extinguished, would quickly revive. It might dispose them not only to respect . . . that treaty of commerce which they had concluded with us . . . but . . . to become our most faithful affectionate, and generous allies.[13]

It is doubtful whether Robertson was indeed either the "moderate Whig " of Brougham's description, or the "Tory" of Dalzel's. Rather he acted "without being Restrain'd by any party Attachment", as his contemporary, Carlyle, phrased it.[14] His political principles were typical of those of most Scottish professional men of his day. His enormous personal success in balancing conflicting interests and attaining agreement from opponents possibly led him to underestimate the difficulties in governing states. Throughout his works, however, lay a strain of belief in the necessity for order and balance to create true freedom. Such order and balance could be seen both in the development of national governments and in the growth of international connections. Robertson's civic stance in his personal life and in his printed works followed logically from his belief in the salutary effects of certain revolutions, and from his

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[13] *Ibid.*, 2:617.

[14] Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 280.

conviction of the cross-effects of political liberty and the Protestant faith,

The publication in 1759 of the *History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary, and of King James VI till his Accession to the Crown of England* determined the course of Robertson's life. From being a parish minister with a "future", as demonstrated by his Assembly tactics in 1757-1758 over the writing of *Douglas* by John Home and the involvement in its production by other ministers, he became a man who had made his impression on those in positions of authority. Lord Bute and the other managers of Scottish patronage[15] were prepared to secure the appointment of the young historian to salaried positions in order to allow him to continue his researches. Within four years Robertson had become the minister of a city parish, was Principal of the University of Edinburgh, and was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. As Carlyle wrote to a friend in 1763,

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[15]For nearly twenty years up to his death in 1761, Scottish patronage was under the control of Archibald Campbell, third Duke of Argyll, better known by his earlier title of Earl of Islay. Argyll was Bute's uncle. Various other men assisted in managing Scottish patronage before and after 1761: Andrew Fletcher, Lord Milton, called, by John Simpson, *sous-ministre* to Islay; James Stuart Mackenzie, Bute's brother, and his *sous-ministre*, William Mure of Caldwell, baron Mure (1718-1776), M. P. for Renfrewshire from 1742-1761, a close friend of both Bute and Hume; Henry Dundas; Lord Cathcart; George Drummond, six times Lord Provost of Edinburgh between 1727 and 1764. See John Simpson, "Who Steered the Gravy Train?", in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement. Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 58-69.

"Robertson has manag'd w^t^ great address. He is Principal, Chaplain, Minister, Historio-grapher and Historian; That is to say he has £508 a year and a house certain, besides what he can make by his books".[16] Robertson had many complex factors to thank for the group of offices which provided him with the income to write, but the patronage behind them was exercised on behalf of his personal merit. His literary abilities and scholarly accuracy prompted Bute to request a history of England, for which this establishment was to provide the means. Robertson's own conciliatory moderatism in Church affairs made him an acceptable candidate for the position of Principal to the governing powers in Edinburgh.[17]

From his correspondence with Bute, it appears that Robertson planned to give up his parish in order to devote more time to writing.[18] McKelvey quoted from these letters to suggest that Robertson was financially "demanding".[19] It seems more likely that when Robertson wrote the letters in question he sincerely intended to give up his parish duties. An explanation for Robertson's decision to keep his living may be deduced from the events of the next year. During his

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[16]Quoted in R. B. Sher and M. A. Stewart, "W.R. and D.H." 80-81.

[17]See Cater, "Making of Principal Robertson", 238-247.

[18]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:135. "Though I am not weary of my profession...I have often wished...to have it in my power to apply myself wholly to my studies."

[19]McKelvey, "W.R. and Lord Bute", 244.

campaign for nomination as Principal in 1762, Robertson recognised that his candidacy was stronger than that of his rival for the position, Adam Ferguson, because the post was normally given to a practising minister of the Church of Scotland.[20] Having received the principalship on these grounds, he may have felt honour-bound to maintain his ecclesiastical character. When he became Moderator of the General Assembly in 1763, he may have further realised that his unique talents for compromise and consensus could be employed to the mutual advantage of Church and University if he continued to serve in both capacities. Finally, it was recognised by all Robertson's peers that he was faithful in his pastoral duties and morally uplifting in the pulpit. When it came to an actual decision, Robertson's personal Presbyterian code of ethics may have determined the issue as to where his duty lay.

The importance of these facts to William Robertson as an historian, however, lay in the practical political skills which he quickly developed, and in the insight which he gained into the realities of administration. The essential nature of such experience had been stated earlier by Bolingbroke:

> The school of example . . . is the world: and the masters of this school are history and experience . . . the study of history, without experience, is insufficient."[21]

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[20]Cater, "Making of Principal Robertson", 81-82.

[21]Bolingbroke, *Letters on History*, 18.

This was reiterated by Adam Ferguson and Hugh Blair in their lectures and writings. Ferguson's strong views of the necessity for the good citizen to involve himself in the life of his community included the proper training for historians. He saw real life as a school of politics in which writers could learn. Leisure was less significant than involvement in forming the proficiency of the scholar.

> He who is penetrating and ardent in the conduct of life, will probably exert a proportional force and ingenuity in the exercise of his literary talents.[22]

Hugh Blair saw two prerequisites for an author to discover the causes of events. He must have "a thorough acquaintance with human nature, and political knowledge, or acquaintance with government".[23] Since Ferguson and Blair were intimates of Robertson during the years when he was receiving patronage posts, it can be assumed that their opinions on the rectitude of his actions were canvassed and taken into account. Robertson must have come to appreciate that his professional life could augment his historical skill. Who better than a parish minister to become familiar with the vagaries of human nature? In the General Assembly and in the University Senate, the knowledge gained of political manoeuvre could bear fruit in a deeper appreciation of the motivation for political action, and a fuller understanding of the possibility of achieving meaningful change.

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[22]Ferguson, *Essay*, 178-79.

[23]Blair, *Lectures*, 482-483.

The effect of Robertson's clerical and administrative career on his interpretation of historical events was profound. From the early 1750s he learned the methods of controlling faction and of cajoling consensus from assembled groups of determined individuals. His skill at this was legendary[24], and it may ultimately have given him an over-optimistic view of the effectiveness of political action generally. His experience did, however, give him an understanding of political intrigue, and the problems which statesmen encountered in trying to reconcile conflicting interests.

Jeffrey Smitten's analysis of the pattern of analogy and contrast which made the *History of Scotland* a coherent narrative, in spite of the apparent lack of development of political system during the reigns of Mary Stuart and James VI (1542-1603), gives a clue to Robertson's analysis of politics. "Contrasting patterns" and "constant shifting of perspective" serve to "enhance the reader's sense of the reality of characters and events".[25] Smitten points to antithesis within one character as well as between two personalities as a means of reinforcing interest. The antithesis is not necessarily between good and evil, but between different qualities, neither being obviously superior. Robertson

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[24]Mackenzie, *Life of John Home*, 61; Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:110.

[25]Smitten, "Robertson's *History of Scotland*", 40.

continued to use this scheme in his subsequent books. In *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V. With a View to the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire, to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century,* published in 1769, the contrasting characters of Charles V and Francis I of France are interwoven throughout the narrative, underlining their different styles of government. The machinations of succeeding popes have their counterparts in the attempts of Protestant German princes to influence events and councils. Robertson's greater knowledge of how affairs of state must be conducted allowed him to handle the discussion of the business of councils and monarchs with confidence, and to enlarge on the theory which he had raised in his *History of Scotland* about the balance of power in the sixteenth century.

Womersley, like Smitten, saw contrasts in Robertson's work, but they were contrasts from one book to another. He saw the theme of the *History of Scotland* as darkness and elusive, deep, hidden causes. The *History of Charles V* presented the challenge of a central interconnected opening of the past, and *America* stressed "disjunction".[26] Womersley, indeed, saw the demands presented by the task of depicting the *History of America* as having jolted Robertson out of his habitual moderation into a new historiography.

Robertson's natural disposition to see order in balance was intensified through his European historical studies, and

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[26]Womersley, "Historical Writings of Robertson", 499-504.

through his communications with his peers. A balance of powers was not a new idea. Harrington and Montesquieu had discussed it; Hume had considered the subject in his *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary* published in 1742, and ten years later had published an essay specifically on the topic, in which he suggested that the Greeks had been well aware of such a policy.[27] As he said, "the maxim of preserving the balance of power is founded so much on common sense and obvious reasoning that it is impossible it could have altogether escaped antiquity."[28] Hume, however, saw all power blocks as destined to inevitable downfall. Robertson, in his writings, would modify that view through his belief in the lasting nature of the current system of politics in Europe. He referred to Hume as "an elegant and profound historian" who had a cyclical view of human affairs (2:13). While Robertson did not actually contradict this stance, he made it clear that the present direction of government was steadily "to introduce order, regularity, and refinement" (2:13). Ferguson, in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, published in 1767, wrote that to preserve the liberty of its citizens, any constitution must have many parts acting to balance one another.[29] Of this group of writers, only Smith seemed less interested in the theory of balance. In his

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[27]Hume, *Essays*, 333-341.

[28]*Ibid.*, 337.

[29]Ferguson, *Essay*, 267.

1766 lectures on Jurisprudence he mentioned briefly "that balance of power which has of late been so much talked of", but beyond splitting Europe into two power blocks, and mentioning that the system grew up in fifteenth century Italy, it did not concern him.[30] From the 1750s when he was researching and writing the *History of Scotland*, Robertson was aware of the need to balance conflicting elements in the constitutional mixture of a nation.

The *History of Scotland* started with a survey of the nation's history prior to the accession of Mary Stuart in 1542. This acted as a necessary introduction to the turmoil of the reign of Mary and the continuous ebb and flow of conspiracies during that of her son. Robertson had divided the history of Scotland into four periods, and dismissed the earliest (ending in the late tenth century) as one of "pure fable and conjecture" (3:2) worthy only of discussion by antiquaries. The next two periods, however, up to the year 1542, included a general overview of the rise of feudalism in Europe, which was important to the consideration of the development of Scotland. "Europe was peopled with soldiers" (3:6) in these centuries, and the sword was employed as "the ultimate judge of all disputes between contending nations" (3:4). Unfortunately, this condition continued in Scotland

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[30]Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, edited by R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael and P. G. Stein, *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 552-553, (hereafter cited as *LJ*).

much longer than in neighbouring nations (3:11), and Robertson was concerned to find an explanation for this. It was due, he concluded, to a lack of balance.

> But, if the authority of the barons far exceeded its proper bounds in the other nations of Europe, we may affirm, that the balance which ought to be preserved between a king and his nobles was almost entirely lost in Scotland. (3:7)

Robertson listed seven reasons which contributed to the continuance of this situation which were peculiar to Scottish circumstances. These gave to the Scottish nobility "that exorbitant and uncommon power" (3:11). He noted in passing how the balance began to change in other countries, with the contrasting policies of Louis XI of France, who engrossed the power of the nobles to the crown, and Henry VII of England, who encouraged the sale of baronial lands by their owners, thereby spreading property ownership among other classes, thus enriching and empowering the "commons" (3:11). The position in Scotland, however, remained unchanged into the sixteenth century. Robertson wrote of the Scottish nobility possessing in 1559 "under an aristocratical form of government, such a share of power, as equalled at all times, and often controlled, that of the sovereign" (3:58).

With the accession of James VI to the English throne in 1603, the situation finally began to change. For the Scots, this was no improvement. Up to that date, nobles and king had held each other in check to the general advantage of the people, because "in this wild form of constitution, there were

principles which tended to their security and advantage" (3:227). Thereafter, the heightened royal power, while it subjected the nobility to its will, left it in possession of its jurisdictional rights to the detriment of the people. Even this slight shift in the previous precarious balance was bad.

> From the union of the crowns to the revolution 1688 [sic], Scotland was placed in a political situation of all others the most singular and the most unhappy; subjected at once to the absolute will of a monarch, and to the oppressive jurisdiction of an aristocracy, it suffered all the miseries peculiar to both these forms of government. (3:227)

The position was finally redressed by the events of 1688, and the Act of Union of 1707. The "claim of right" (3:228) gave Scotland security, power, and commerce. In the *Wealth of Nations* Smith wrote:

> By the union with England, the middling and inferior ranks of people in Scotland gained a compleat deliverance from the power of an aristocracy which had always before oppressed them.[31]

Nearly two decades earlier, Robertson had remarked that "as the nobles were deprived of power, the people acquired liberty" (3:228), and a new and better balance finally appeared. May this have been an example of Robertson's historical insight influencing Smith, or were these merely ideas of common currency in their circle?

> Exempted from burdens to which they were formerly subject, screened from oppression to which they had been long exposed, and adopted into a constitution whose genius and laws were more liberal than their

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[31]Smith, *WN*, 2:944.

> own, they have extended their commerce, refined their manners, made improvements in the elegances of life, and cultivated the arts and sciences. (3:228)

Here was the statement of William Robertson's personal political creed. This creed comprised a practical belief in the balance of power, and a political accdeptance of the Hanoverian settlement in Scotland based on the Act of Union of 1707.

This discussion of the trends of modern constitutional policy was continued in the *History of Charles V*. The death of Lewis II of Hungary and Bohemia at the battle of Mohacz in 1526 occasioned the comment that feudal institutions still survived in those states, the nobles having "such extensive power that the crowns were still elective" (2:163). The subsequent election of the Archduke Ferdinand, the brother of Charles V, to the vacant thrones had the effect of creating disproportionate power for the Hapsburgs on the international scene.

The Kingdom of Castile also presented to Robertson an interesting study in constitutional balance. As he described the Spanish kingdoms at the commencement of Charles' reign, power was shared by the Crown, the nobility and the cities in an uneasy partnership. Segovia, Toledo and Seville took the lead in creating what Robertson called a "union among the commons of Castile" (2:83). To Robertson, the representatives of these cities in the Cortes "were accustomed . . . to check the encroachments of the king and the oppression of the

nobles" (2:121). A popular insurrection in 1522 was based on grievances similar to those voiced later in England against the Stuart kings.

> The principles of liberty seem to have been better understood, at this period, by the Castilians, than by any other people in Europe; they had acquired liberal ideas with respect to their own rights and privileges; they had formed more bold and generous sentiments concerning government; and discovered an extent of political knowledge to which the English themselves did not attain until more than a century afterwards. (2:123-124)

The Junta leading the commons was only defeated when the nobility, who had originally supported it, took fright at attempts to reduce aristocratic privileges as well as those of the crown. The end result, instead of a new balance with shared powers between the three forces, was the total aggrandizement of the crown and the loss of civic influence. Two decades later, Robertson felt that the nobles reaped the fruit that they had sown.

> By enabling Charles to depress one of the orders in the state, they destroyed that balance to which the constitution owed its security, and put it in his power, or in that of his successors, to humble the other, and to strip it gradually of its most valuable privileges. (2:208)

A truly modern state required a balanced foundation. Robertson saw the reign of Charles V as preventing the early stages of such a balance from developing into a constitutional monarchy on the British model.

The notion of a constitutional balance benefitting all classes appeared again briefly in 1791 in Robertson's last work, *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge*

which the Ancients had of India; and the Progress of Trade with that Country, prior to the Discovery of the Passage to it by the Cape of Good Hope. In the Appendix to this short book, Robertson touched upon what was known of the institutions of India. He believed that there were inherent strengths in the caste system which mitigated its evils. Royal authority was balanced by the powers of the Brahmins and by the security of tenure of the agricultural workers. Thus the "sacred rights of the Brahmins" (3:India 54) prevented regal encroachments, and were themselves circumscribed by the powers of the administrative class. Furthermore, in a country where land was held directly from the sovereign, and where the produce of the land was properly valued, since the climate allowed the land to yield "its productions almost spontaneously" (3:India 54), the farmer could easily pay his rent, pass his land down to his children, and form a very stable and protected class of society (3: India 54). A property-owning, landed class was the basis of stability for a nation. The stability which the Indian farmer gave to the state was the same as that which the gentry provided in Britain.

Even in his earliest works, Robertson displayed an interest in the growth of a power balance in the European state system. Robertson's views were stated by his friend, and chosen[32] biographer, Dugald Stewart, when he called the

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[32]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:199; Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:100.

political condition of modern Europe "a state of society far more favourable to the general and permanent happiness of the human race than any which the world had hitherto seen".[33] Since utility was always the measure of the value of a system to Robertson, human happiness was his greatest good. In Book 1 of the *History of Scotland*, Robertson said that the Italians had discovered in the sixteenth century "the great secret of modern politics" (3:25): that of balancing the power of one prince against another. In his reflections on the possible marriage choices of Mary Stuart in 1563, Robertson considered the fact that this alliance was an important counter in European power politics, and thus aroused both passion and intrigue. In a lengthy passage Robertson reviewed the positions of the various continental sovereigns, plus those of Elizabeth Tudor and of Mary's own subjects. He concluded that Mary acted wisely in being willing to "sacrifice her own ambition" in marrying a subject rather than running the obvious risks of a foreign union (3:85).

Robertson returned to this theme in the *History of Charles V*. The idea of a European balance of power was central to his history of the period. The states of Europe had been welded into "one great system" (2:34), a unified whole, the actions of any member of which affected all the others. To Robertson, the sense of this policy was so self-evident that he discussed the reasons why it had not been

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[33]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:147.

implemented earlier. In a passage in which the Humean influence seems clear, he argued that, since wisdom and capacity for action are "the portion of men in every age", the causes of early European disunity must lie in the inadequate internal administrative mechanisms of the individual states (2:34). Changes made in the fifteenth century led to the final development of a European system of power balance in the reign of Charles V, therefore:

> A view of the causes and events which contributed to establish a plan of policy, more salutary and extensive than any that has taken place in the conduct of human affairs, is . . . a capital object in the history of Europe. (2:35)

The battle of Pavia, in 1525, caused a shift in balance which concerned all Europe. At Pavia the French were routed by the Imperial army, and Francis I was taken prisoner. Henry VIII of England was alarmed at "the prospect of sudden and entire revolution which this would occasion in the political system" (2:144), and the Italian states were shocked at the sudden destruction of "that balance of power on which they relied for their security, and which it had been the constant object of all their negotiations and refinements to maintain" (2:145).

In Germany the grouping and regrouping of Protestant and Catholic princes were likewise frequently based on considerations of power structure and Imperial strength. This can be illustrated by the actions of the Princes of the Empire at the time of the revolt of Maurice of Saxony against Charles in 1552. Catholic as well as Protestant rulers reflected on

the dangers inherent in giving too much assistance to the Emperor. They were:

> Cautious how they contributed . . . to put the emperor in a position of power which would be fatal to the liberties of their country . . . [so] they chose rather that the Protestants should acquire that security for their religion which they demanded, than by assisting Charles . . . to give such additional force to the Imperial prerogative, as would overturn the constitution of the empire. (2;305)

Robertson saw Philip II as restoring the Italian balance in 1558 when he made concessions in Parma and Tuscany. Since power was then "poised with greater equality" among the Italian states, later wars took place in different theatres. In Robertson's disapproving words, hostilities "stained other regions of Europe with blood, and rendered them miserable, in their turn, by the devastations of war" (2:351). For Robertson, the progress of mankind was a process which should be achieved by the steady march of civilization and commerce rather than retarded by internecine belligerence.

4. THE PROGRESS OF SOCIETY

Robertson linked the writing of history to the study of the development of man in society. "Nations," he said, "as well as men, arrive at maturity by degrees" (3:1). History and society were subjects of general interest to the educated Scot of the mid-eighteenth century. In 1742, Hume said, "Man, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society."[1] Forty years later, in 1785, Lord Cullen[2] repeated the thought in the *Lounger*, "Men were born to live in society; and from society only can happiness be derived".[3] This being the case, a knowledge of how modern communities had arisen, and a comprehension of the necessary rules which determined their organization, were vital for men to ensure the continuance of that social order and personal liberty which contributed to the happiness of all.

In 1793, Dugald Stewart, speaking of Adam Smith and this Scottish interest in "the science of man", said, "To this species of philosophical investigation . . . I shall take the liberty of giving the title of *Theoretical or Conjectural History*."[4] By giving this name to the inquiries of his

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[1]Hume, "On the Origin of Government", *Essays*, 37.

[2]Robert Cullen (?1740-1810), son of Dr. William Cullen, lawyer, lord of Session, 1796.

[3]Lord Craig, letter to Editor in *Lounger*, 36.

[4]Stewart, *Life of Adam Smith*, 10:34.

compatriots, Stewart slightly changed the meaning of "conjectural" from the understanding which Robertson had of it. To Robertson, the word had a negative content when he used it to describe unjustified speculations. The period before written history was one "of conjecture, of fable, and of uncertainty" (3:India 1). Furthermore, "it is not by theory or conjectures that history decides with regard to the state or character of nations" (1:224). Stewart's understanding of "conjecture" meant that, although the historian might not be able to document exactly the course of an event, he should be capable of suggesting a possible natural cause. Robertson's actual usage, especially as he grew more confident of his powers, corresponds with Stewart's description of the task of the historian. Where he felt it reasonable, Robertson connected events to causes, and listed the stages by which society developed.

Conjectural history had a respectable pedigree in Scotland. The theory that society had developed organically had been discussed since the beginning of the century. At the same time, interest in the sources of man's understanding and his moral sense had been given academic stimulus by Francis Hutcheson, who became professor of moral philosophy in the University of Glasgow in 1730, and there "diffused . . . a liberality of sentiment, and a refinement of taste."[5] His work influenced both David Hume and Adam Smith, who was his

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[5]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:105.

pupil in Glasgow. Hume and Smith re-examined the past for guidance in formulating empirical theories about modern society and economics. They saw that the study of the growth of institutions in distant times could lead to fresh insights into their functions in the present. From Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun[6] through Francis Hutcheson and David Hume to Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson, Scottish thinkers discussed this Science of Man and traced the course of the development both of moral principles and political systems. Moral and civil ends might well be the same. Adam Ferguson stated that "if the public good be the principal object with individuals, it is likewise true, that the happiness of individuals is the great end of civil society."[7]

The works of the French *philosophes* on the subject of societal development, were well known to their Scottish counterparts[8], by whom Montesquieu was regarded as the founder of the modern school of writers on culture, politics and

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[6]Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655-1716), Scottish politician who wished for greater independence for Scotland. He opposed the Act of Union of 1707, which united the Scottish and English parliaments giving a disproportionate number of seats to England in both Lords and Commons. Lord Milton was his nephew.

[7]Ferguson, *Essay*, 58.

[8]Ronald Hamowy, "Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and the Division of Labour", *Economica* 35 (1968), 249-259. Hamowy demonstrated that Smith and Ferguson both took their example of the division of labour, the manufacture of pins, from the 1755 edition of the *Encyclopédie*, thus indicating Scottish familiarity with contemporary French thought.

jurisprudence.[9] Smith and Hume were personally acquainted with Quesnay and Turgot.[10] The Scots, however, pursued the Science of Man with a earnestness which reflected their Calvinist backgrounds and their repressed nationalism. The need to redefine a moral civic purpose outside a political framework was unique to Scotland, because of the loss of the Scottish Parliament in 1707. The *literati* accepted this because it was a dogma of their philosophy that constitutional change happened through organic growth, and could not be forced. The Hanoverian settlement now existed, and could only be altered at great peril. This had been stated at the beginning of the century by Fletcher of Saltoun:

> Let no Man think, that it is an easie matter to alter any Branch of a Constitution: The fundamental Settlements of a Constitution are like so many Links of a Chain, when one Link is broke, the whole Chain is broke; and if one State of the Nation sets up a Rivalship with another, perhaps a third Party lies in wait to put the whole under Chains.[11]

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[9]For example, Robertson, discussing the conversion of allodial landholdings into feudal ones by Europeans between the sixth and tenth centuries, said, "The motives which determined them to a choice so repugnant to the ideas of modern times concerning property, have been investigated and explained by M. de Montesquieu, with his usual discernment and accuracy, lib. xxxi,c.8" (2:380).

[10]A.-R.-J. Turgot, (1727-1781), French politician and writer. François Quesnay (1694-1774), French doctor and writer on physiocratic economics.
See Smith, *Correspondence*, 113-114, and WN, 2:672-673.

[11]Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, *State of the Controversy betwixt United and Separate Parliaments*, with an introduction by P. H. Scott, (Edinburgh: Printed for the Saltire Society by William Blackwood, 1982), 25.

His position was reiterated by Hume, Smith, Kames,[12] Ferguson, Millar[13] and Stewart during the course of the eighteenth century. They elaborated the theory to express the view that social structures arose spontaneously, without any human or divine guiding principle. Social orders so constituted could not be arbitrarily altered without great risk to the fabric of society because of the complexity of the underlying structures which had grown up organically over time.[14] The essential unity of the links of the chain was clearly emphasised by all these philosophers.

The acceptance of the political situation in Scotland which was the consequence of this constitutional theory did not prevent consideration being given to its antecedents. To the study of man's ethical and economic nature, the research into the past was a natural corollary. Phillipson believes that in the years after the Act of Union the Scots created a "new language of civic morality" to replace participation in the political process. This "provided the Scots with a new understanding of civic virtue and that 'sociological' understanding of the Science of Man which is the unique

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[12]Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782), was a judge, a member of the Select Society, an improving landowner, and a prolific writer.

[13]John Millar (1735-1801), professor of law at Glasgow University, author.

[14]Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c.1987), 3 7.

contribution of the Scots to the philosophy of the Enlightenment".[15] Scots historians created a new interest in the growth of constitution and society. With reference to the world of the barbarian invasions, Robertson wrote:

> In the obscurity of the chaos occasioned by this general wreck of nations, we must search for the seeds of order, and endeavour to discover the first rudiments of the policy and laws now established in Europe. (2:10)

This was the task which he and his fellow thinkers had set themselves.

The conclusion which eighteenth century writers reached was that there had been a four stage developmental process through which man advanced from the lowest level of survival by hunting and gathering to a modern urban mode of life. In their articulation of such a stadial theory of societal development, the Scots thinkers based the stages on the modes of subsistence of various population groups. "In every inquiry concerning the operations of men when united together in society, the first object of attention should be their mode of subsistence", said Robertson (1:104). Furthermore:

> In tracing the line by which nations proceed towards civilization, the discovery of the useful metals, and the acquisition of dominion over the animal creation, have been marked as steps of capital importance in their progress. (1:222)

The stages were stated generally as hunting, pasturage, agriculture and commercial civilization.

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[15]Nicholas Phillipson, "The Scottish Enlightenment" in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, edited by Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22.

The terminology that the Scots used supported the stadial theory. Smith would lecture about "a savage who supports himself by hunting"[16] Speaking of the Borders[17] during the reign of Mary Stuart in the *History of Scotland*, Robertson said that "the inhabitants, strangers to industry, averse from labour, and unacquainted with the arts of peace, subsisted chiefly by spoil and pillage; and . . . committed these excesses . . . with honour" (3:77). Accordingly, an attempt to bring royal justice to the area required preparations "such as might be expected in the rudest and most imperfect state of society" (3:78). It is clear that to Robertson, "spoil and pillage" approximated hunting and gathering in terms of mode of subsistence. The problems of survival by this mode were clear to Robertson; for climatic and other reasons it "affords but an uncertain maintenance" (1:106). As a result, "the life of a hunter gradually leads man to a state more advanced" (1:106). In America, this state was some form of primitive agriculture. In ancient Europe, it was pasturage.

If the savage was a hunter, the barbarian was one who was "not far advanced in [his] progress beyond the rudest state of social life" with "little relish" for comsumer goods "alluring to polished nations" (3:India 46). In other words, he was a shepherd, or at best engaged in basic agriculture.

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[16]Smith *LJ*, 348.

[17]The historically lawless uplands on both sides of the Scottish-English frontier, traditionally known for "reivers" or cattle rustlers.

As Robertson said, "the state of society among the ancient Germans was of the rudest and most simple form. They subsisted entirely by hunting or by pasturage. . . . [They] disdained to cultivate the earth, or to touch a plough" (2:374). The settlement of the "barbarous nations" in Europe at the fall of the Roman Empire was achieved by "destructive progress" (3:10). In a lengthy Note in which Robertson discussed the sources he had used, especially Caesar and Tacitus for the ancient German tribes, he compared the ancient Germans to the modern American Indians. He saw many similarities, but said that the comparison must not be pushed too far. The Americans were generally "in a ruder and more simple state than the ancient Germans" (2:376). From these statements, it seems reasonable to assume that savages were hunters,[18] while barbarians were at worst shepherds,[19] and that Robertson had been at least partially considering modes of subsistence from the mid-1750s. It might also be suggested that the words "savage" and "barbarian" referred to the level of social union which had been reached, and had little reference to any moral judgment.[20]

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[18]See William R. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore, "Introduction" in Father Joseph François Lafitau, *The Customs of the American Indians compared with the Customs of Primitive Times, 2 vols. The Publications of the Champlain Society* 48, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974), 1:lxx.

[19]*Ibid*, 1:lxxi.

[20]"Savage" was a word derived from the Latin "silva" or wood, and merely meant a forest-dweller, while a "barbarian", from the Greek, was originally only a foreigner.

It was clear that once agriculture was reached, with its accompanying settled communal life and private property, "polished" society would eventually follow, although this development would inevitably be slow. Robertson's view of the progress of man to the fourth stage is perhaps most clearly expressed in a lengthy quotation from the opening chapter of the *History of America*:

> Men are, indeed, far advanced in improvement before commerce becomes an object of great importance to them. They must even have made some considerable progress towards civilization, before they acquire the idea of property, and ascertain it so perfectly as to be acquainted with the most simple of all contracts, that of exchanging by barter one rude commodity for another, But as soon as this important right is established, and every individual feels that he has an exclusive title to possess or to alienate whatever he has acquired by his own labour and dexterity, the wants and ingenuity of his nature suggest to him a new method of increasing his acquisitions and enjoyments, by disposing of what is superfluous in his own stores, in order to procure what is necessary or desirable in those of other men. Thus a commercial intercourse begins. (1:1)

In 1758, Henry Home, Lord Kames published a volume of essays. There, in a chapter on justice as it related to property, he discussed three stages of society, and how in order to survive, man's "hoarding disposition" led to the sense of property. Man's "original occupations" were hunting and fishing. The need for regular food, however, drove him to become a shepherd, and later still, a cultivator.[21]

In his lectures in Jurisprudence, student notes of which

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[21]Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (London: 1758. Reprint, Hildesheim, N.Y.: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976), 76-78.

exist from 1762-1763, Adam Smith said:

> There are four distinct states which mankind pass thro:-1st, the Age of Hunters; 2dly, the Age of Shepherds; 3dly, the Age of Agriculture; and 4thly, the Age of Commerce.[22]

The lecture continued by defining each stage, hunting and gathering, herding, cultivating and finally bartering. Anomalies existed, such as the North American Indians, who had apparently missed out the herding stage, while having a basic knowledge of raising corn. The laws of property varied according to the stage of development.[23] If it is assumed, as seems likely, that Smith in fact mentioned such theories to students of his private classes in Edinburgh as early as 1748,[24] his work pre-dated that of Kames and Robertson. It would also seem probable that the subject was discussed at dinner-parties or at groups such as the Select Society on Smith's later visits after his move to Glasgow. Smith, himself, seems to have felt some discomfort about others using the four stage theory.[25] Robertson employed his stadial theory in a historical context to explain differing states of

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[22]Smith, *LJ*, 14.

[23]Smith, *LJ*, 14-37.

[24]Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 107-112.

[25]See Stewart, *Life of Adam Smith*, 10:67. Stewart referred to a paper which Smith gave to "a society of which he was then a member" detailing principles "to which he was anxious to establish his exclusive right".
See also Smith, *Correspondence*, 192 n.2, and Meek, *Social Science*, 138, who dismissed the notion of plagiarism by Robertson.

society, although he did not specifically make the division between the third and fourth stages. It is hard to see any part of his work as plagiarism from Smith. Rather he acknowledged his debt to Smith as theorist, and saw it as a compliment to incorporate those theories, which were appropriate, into his histories. As he said to Smith in April, 1776,

> None of your friends, however, will profit more by your labours and discoveries than I. . . . I shall often follow you as my Guide and instructor.[26]

Robertson drew historical and anthropological conclusions from the theory, and enunciated these in a way that has had a lasting impact on man's perceptions of his cultural growth.[27] As a professional historian, he drew legitimate inferences from the leading scholarship of his day in order to cast light on the differences and similarities of men and the societies in which they dwelt.

> The characters of nations depend on the state of society in which they live, and on the political institutions established among them; and . . . the human mind, whenever it is placed in the same situation, will, in ages the most distant, and in countries the most remote, assume the same form, and be distinguished by the same manners. (2:376)

In his research for the *History of America*, Robertson found abundant material with which to discuss the different

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[26]Smith, *Correspondence*, 192.

[27]Meek said that Robertson's account of the customs and institutions of the American peoples in Book 4 of the *History of America* is "a landmark in the development of cultural anthropology". *Social Science*, 143.

levels of progress of the tribal and national groups with which he dealt. Although on occasion Robertson seemed to have agreed with a cyclical view of state development,[28] in most of his histories, he saw the personal growth of mankind as progressive. Thus the barbarians, who conquered the Roman Empire, at first "retained the original simplicity of their pastoral manners", but later they advanced "from rudeness to refinement, as is the usual course of progression which nations are destined to hold" (3:India 46). This progress, however, is inevitably slow (1:1).

It was in this book that Robertson considered most fully the development of man and his life in society.

> Man existed as an individual before he became the member of a community; and the qualities which belong to him under his former capacity should be known, before we proceed to examine those which arise from the latter relation. This is peculiarly necessary in investigating the manners of rude nations. . . . Men in this state ought to be viewed rather as independent agents, than as members of a regular society. The character of a savage results almost entirely from his sentiments or feelings as an individual, and is but little influenced by his imperfect subjection to government and order. (1:93)

Robertson was a pragmatist, rather than a theoretician, at all times. He reasoned inductively from the facts of man's customs as he could discover them.[29] His ability to see both sides of every question prevented Robertson from ever creating a dogmatic system of history. His rules always had

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[28]E. g. the rise and fall of the Roman Empire (1:9).

[29]See Chapter 7 for Robertson's use of questionnaires.

exceptions; each position in a scholarly dispute was mentioned.[30] Here, while he agreed with Hume about the family unit, saying that "the domestic state is the first and most simple form of human association" (1:102), he also felt that the characteristics of the individual influenced those of any society. He was struggling to reach a more complete comprehension of the totality of man's existence than could be determined from merely his means of subsistence. Rather, he felt that the mode itself influenced and was influenced by the qualities of man at each stage of his development. America provided a fascinating laboratory of ideas from which to work in building a picture of man's rise from primitivism to civilization. To differences of "climate and soil" by which "philosophers of great eminence" accounted for the peculiarities of race, Robertson saw the need to add "political and moral causes" (1:94-95). He believed that the state of society itself created needs, which in turn affected men both physically and morally.

In his description of the native people of America, Robertson sounded at times like a disciple of Rousseau, although always one with mental reservations. He spoke of the

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[30]Apropos scholarly opinion on America, Robertson summarized the views of those who saw America as "degenerate", and of those who followed Rousseau in considering "that as the most perfect state of man which is the least civilized." As he said. "these contradictory theories have been proposed with equal confidence, and uncommon powers of genius and eloquence have been exerted, in order to clothe them with an appearance of truth" (1:92-93).

equality, independence and bravery of the North American Indians. "Force of mind, a sense of personal dignity, gallantry in enterprise, invincible perseverance in execution, contempt of danger and death, are the characteristic virtues of uncivilized nations" (2:13).[31] It was also true, however, that:

> the exercise of the understanding among rude nations is . . . limited. The first ideas of every human being must be such as he receives by the senses. But in the mind of man, while in the savage state, there seem to be hardly any ideas but what enter by this avenue. (1:100)

Hunters were active and vigorous, adjectives which Robertson always used with approval. Men without property[32] lived together in similar conditions, only being subordinate in times of war or during the chase, when "the warrior of most approved courage leads the youth to the combat" (1:109). Communal groups were of necessity small, because larger units would not find adequate subsistence. Robertson compared them to beasts of prey, which never hunted in herds (1:108)! Their cruelty to one another was only matched by their bravery (1:116). Once again there were contradictions, the character of the South American Indians was often simple and trusting, which brought about their downfall at the hands of the Spaniards (1:30). Following Montesquieu, Robertson attributed this softness of disposition to climate (1:111).

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[31]See also 1:109-119, 1:225.

[32]"Nations which depend upon hunting are in a great measure strangers to the idea of property" (1:109).

Along with his contemporaries, Robertson attributed the advent of private property to a change in the mode of subsistence. In a hunting society, co-operation was essential, and in a small community, all would share in the results of such partnership. "Strangers to the idea of property, the difference in condition resulting from the inequality of it is unknown" (1:225). With the domestication of animals, private ownership was introduced. Life was still migratory, and property necessarily limited in this phase. In a society with little property, government was not necessary. Robertson explained, "Where the right of separate and exclusive possession is not introduced, the great object of law and jurisdiction does not exist" (1:110). The advent of agriculture, however, changed the form of communal life. Men no longer lived in a state of mobility, owning only what could be carried. Under an agricultural economy, they lived in settlements and owned personal possessions. To Robertson, this was the most significant advance, because it brought with it government and "police", and along with them "the subordination of ranks".

Robertson detailed these factors which change the character of a people in his discussion of the Mexican and Peruvian empires (1:111-112). Private property, settled cities, the separation of professions, and the distinction of ranks led to a monarchical government in Mexico (1:224-226), where, "the distinction of ranks was completely established,

in a line of regular subordination, reaching from the highest to the lowest member of the community" (1:225). Likewise in Peru, there was agriculture, property, towns "which may be termed large when compared with those in other parts of America" (1:112), regular government, and the distinction of ranks. "It is only in societies", continued Robertson, "which time and the institution of regular government have molded into form, that we find such an orderly arrangement of men into different ranks, and such nice attention paid to their various rights" (1:226). His attitude to this issue contained a degree of tension, reminiscent of his personal feelings about the Scottish-English relationship. His belief in regular government, order and rights was frequently at war with his admiration for independence, and his disapproval of the results of subordination. "The great body of the people was in a most humiliating state", he remarked of the Mexican class system. Commenting on the autocratic political systems of the Natchez and Peruvians, Robertson noted that agriculture and the arts had been introduced, along with the idea of private property. Thus:

> Avarice and ambition have acquired objects . . . views of interest allure the selfish; the desire of pre-eminence excites the enterprising . . . and passions unknown to man in his savage state prompt the interested and ambitious to encroach on the rights of their fellow-citizens. (1:112)

Passages like this indeed present Robertson in the image of the Jacobin that his son wished to be forgotten.

Robertson displayed the same approval for European tribes

such as the Huns and Alans, who enjoyed "freedom and independence in such a high degree as seems to be scarcely compatible with a state of social union, or with the subordination necessary to maintain it" (2:10). The last clause, however, contains the key to his thinking. The Scots believed that man's happiness lay in society, therefore "social union" must be maintained, at whatever reasonable cost in loss of freedom for the individual. A 1752 group statement by Robertson and his friends on a matter of church discipline said: "There can be no union, and by consequence there can be no society, where there is no subordination."[33] In a well-run state, private property, the division of labour, and the distinction of ranks provided security of life and tenure for all citizens. The fatal flaw of feudal society was that the balance altered in favour of the nobles and, as in Mexico, "the yoke of servitude depressed the people" (2:13). Where government functioned properly, on the other hand, it served "to abolish confusion and barbarism, and to introduce order, regularity, and refinement" (2:13). It is possible that Robertson appreciated the social problems foreseen by Adam Ferguson in the division of labour, since he saw so clearly how any imbalance in the state affected the individual. His

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[33]"Reasons of Dissent from the Judgment and Resolution of the Commission, March 11, 1752, resolving to inflict no Censure on the Presbytery of Dunfermline for their Disobedience in relation to the Settlement of Inverkeithing." The first two articles of this are quoted in Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:232-234.

usual optimism might have allowed him to believe that the value of an orderly community would counteract any ill effects. To go back to the words of Adam Ferguson, "the happiness of individuals is the great end of civil society", and Robertson was attempting to prove that the complicated, modern, "polished"[34] state was the best vehicle to achieve this.

In his researches into the history of early Europe and of more recent America, Robertson was looking for "the seeds of order", and finding them in changes in modes of subsistence, in the change to a settled from a migratory lifestyle, in division of labour and distinction of ranks, and in subordination to governing powers. When he added liberty into the equation which he was trying to solve, however, he found two other components, the city and commerce, which had to be considered.

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[34]The word "polished" was derived from the French term "policé". To Smith, "the objects of Police are the cheapness of commodities, public security, and cleanliness. . . . Under this head we will consider the opulence of a state." *LJ*, 398. Robertson followed this usage.

5. CITIES AND COMMERCE

> The activity of commerce is coeval with the foundation of cities; and from the moment that the members of any community settle in considerable numbers in one place, its operations become vigorous. (1:240)

"Activity" and "vigour" were prime words in William Robertson's vocabulary of approbation, often used to describe men in an advanced state of society. They contrasted with the "listless indolence" (1:101) of the savage.[1] In his habitual search for causes, Robertson explained this;

> As the individual advances from the ignorance and imbecility of the infant state to vigour and maturity of understanding, something similar to this may be observed in the progress of the species. (1:99)

Before intellectual powers could develop in the individual, they had to be exercised. Only need could provide the necessary goad to this end. First greater security of subsistence was the spur, then the desire for superior comfort or luxury. In societal progress, the same thing would be true.

> If we examine into the motives which rouse men to activity in civilized life, and prompt them to persevere in fatiguing exertions of their ingenuity or strength, we shall find that they arise chiefly from acquired wants and appetites. These are numerous and importunate; they keep the mind in perpetual agitation, and, in order to gratify them, invention must be always on the stretch, and industry must be

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[1]The enervated *Creoles* in Spanish America displayed similar characteristics. "Languid and unenterprising, the operations of an active extended commerce would be to them so cumbersome and oppressive, that in almost every part of America they decline engaging in it" (1:254).

incessantly employed. (1:101)

Robertson's interpretation of the rise of European civilization was based on this theory of stimulation by acquired needs. The vigorous human mind would strive to invent and to produce items of convenience and luxury. Merchants who carried on the trade in these products were gifted with "quick sighted discernment" (3:India 39). Personal freedom developed along with commercial and artistic activity in most advanced societies, motivated by the same spirit of enterprise.

Although Robertson did not actually summarize the four stages through which society passed, as had Smith, the stadial theory was an integral component of his vision of history. The "polished" state was the result of slow growth.[2] The earlier three stages were the prerequisites to the formation of the modern urban existence which Robertson enjoyed, and which he considered as the gift of Divine Providence. As he said in 1755, "There is no employment more delightful . . . than the contemplation of the divine wisdom in the government of this world. —The civil history of mankind opens a wide field for this pious exercise."[3]

Robertson saw cities and commerce developing together.

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[2]"In our continent . . . society continued in that state which is denominated barbarous. Even with all that command over nature which [metal-working and control of animals] confer, many ages elapse before industry becomes so regular as to render subsistence secure" (1:222).

[3]Quoted in Horn, "Principal Robertson", 158.

His model began with individual property being bartered (1:1);[4] the grouping together of men in stable communities was "coeval" (1:240) with this, and these two factors stimulated each other. Troubled conditions during the early feudal period obligated town dwellers to appeal for protection to local lords, with the result that "the inhabitants were deprived of those rights, which, in social life, are deemed natural and inalienable" (2:16). They became, in fact, serfs, as were agricultural workers. This caused "the spirit of industry" (2:16) to be unreasonably depressed. In the eleventh century, Italian cities gradually began to reassert their privileges, taking advantage of papal and imperial conflicts (1:16). Robertson saw the Crusades as giving a further impetus to change. Not only did the Frankish Crusaders see a new and more luxurious world in the East, but their leaders required large sums of money to finance their expeditions. To raise these amounts, feudal magnates sold immunities to city magistrates. As civic rights gradually extended, the security of person and property within the walls of a town became greater. This stimulated population growth and expanded trade. Rules made by the body of magistrates of each community regarding the safety of persons and property, were soon followed by ordinances regulating taxation and

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[4]Smith also saw bartering as the beginning of the division of labour. "The certainty of disposing of the su(r)plus produce of his labour in this way is what ena(b)led men to seperate into diffrenet trades of ev(e)ry sort" (*sic*). *LJ*, 351.

trade. The industrious merchant gained a voice in the government of his town. The protection of walls, the formation of a militia for mutual defence, and the internal "police" of a city encouraged its inhabitants to ply their trades with confidence. This feeling of assurance on the part of the citizens engendered a new sense of freedom.

> The inhabitants of cities, having obtained personal freedom and municipal jurisdiction, soon acquired civil liberty and political power. (2:18)

In turn, country-dwellers were encouraged by example to "recover liberty by enfranchisement" (2:18). This essentially Italian pattern spread throughout the Europe of which Robertson was concerned; Italy, France, Germany, Spain and England.

The connection between city life, commerce, and liberty had been noted earlier by Hume in his Essays[5] and by Smith in his lectures.[6] Robertson saw this as an indication of the progress of the modern world. The liberties of Greece and Rome had been lost, but a new Europe had been produced in the crucible of the sixteenth century. Perhaps the resulting freedoms would be more durable.

> The genius of the internal government established among the inhabitants of cities, which, even in countries where despotic power prevails most, is democratical and republican, rendered the idea of

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[5]Hume, *Essays*, 92. "If we trace commerce in its progress through TYRE, ATHENS, SYRACUSE, CARTHAGE, VENICE, FLORENCE, GENOA, ANTWERP, HOLLAND, ENGLAND, &c. we shall always find it to have fixed its seat in free governments."

[6]See below, 102-105.

liberty familiar and dear to them. (2:121)

Robertson tried to put these themes together into a historical context, and to illustrate them with actual examples. He introduced this correlation briefly into his first book, the *History of Scotland*, and continued to develop it in his other works. By the time that Robertson wrote *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India; and the Progress of Trade with that Country, prior to the Discovery of the Passage to it by the Cape of Good Hope. With an Appendix containing Observations on the Civil Policy - the Laws and Judicial Proceedings - the Arts - the Sciences- and Religious Institutions of the Indians*, the issues of trade and the growth of cities were of central importance. There was a clear progression in Robertson's ideas in this direction as he aged and grew more informed about economics.

Since Robertson was accused of plagiarism,[7] the development of his thought is interesting. The *History of Scotland* was being offered to publishers by 1758. Since it was being written by a young minister with pastoral duties to perform and sermons to compose, it must have taken some years to complete. It would be reasonable to assume that Robertson

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[7]In fact, more than once. According to the anonymous biographer of the *Works* of 1828, Robertson was accused of plagiarising Dr. Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History* for his 1755 sermon. "In this instance there appears not to be a shadow of evidence to support the charge", added the biographer (1:xi). With reference to the accusation of unacknowledged borrowings from Adam Smith, see below.

began his research in the late 1740s.[8] His father had been interested in history, especially the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, about which he had collected information. It seems possible that Robertson's early studies were stimulated by papers or books inherited from his father in 1745. The first section of the book contained an analysis of the causes of the politically backward condition of Scotland in the mid-sixteenth century. Robertson traced there the early history of his country from the Roman Empire through the Picts and Scots to the development of feudalism.

> When we take a view of the feudal system of laws and policy . . . the first object that strikes us is the King . . . we are apt to pronounce him a powerful, nay an absolute monarch. No conclusion, however, would be more rash, or worse founded. . . . With all the ensigns of royalty . . . a feudal prince was the most limited of all princes. (3:4-5)

He introduced his belief of the imbalance of powers which gave the Scottish aristocracy such deciding influence in the conduct of affairs in the kingdom. In his list of reasons for this imbalance, the lack of any large cities ranks second.

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[8] The anonymous biographer said that "he had long been sedulously engaged on it, having formed the plan of it, as is said, soon after his settlement at Gladsmuir. It appears . . . that he had entered on it so early as the year 1753" (1:xii). It seems possible that Robertson began his research before 1750. Presumably he had access to the historical papers on Mary Queen of Scots, collected by his father. Stewart published a letter from Robertson to Sir David Dalrymple dated October, 1753, in which he said, "I intend to employ some of the idle time this winter in making a more diligent inquiry than ever I have done into that period of Scots History from the death of King James V to the death of Queen Mary" (10: 209-210). This certainly suggests that Robertson had been working on the subject prior to that date.

> Where-ever numbers of men assemble together, order must be established, and a regular form of government instituted; the authority of the magistrate must be recognised, and his decisions meet with prompt and full obedience. Laws and subordination take rise in cities; and where there are few cities . . . there are few or no traces of a well arranged police. (3:8)

In feudal Scotland there were indeed few cities. Robertson continued with the statement that commerce was "the chief means of assembling mankind", and that under the feudal system, it was not encouraged because the nobles lived on their estates, and there was no permanent court. The small size of the resulting market for luxury goods retarded the growth of commerce, and thus the growth of cities in Scotland. Towards the end of the *History of Scotland*, Robertson mentioned the connection between cities and commerce again. Speaking of an attempt by James VI to pacify the Highlands by means of town settlements, he said that these would be "a retreat for the industrious, and a nursery for arts and commerce" (3:224). It was only, however, with the Act of Union, and the consequent depression of the power of the nobles, that full commercial growth took place in Scotland. With freedom, the people "have extended their commerce, refined their manners, made improvements in the elegances of life, and cultivated the arts and sciences" (3:228).

The final pages of the introductory book of the *History of Scotland* were devoted to "a view of the political state of Europe" (3:24-27). Robertson considered this background essential to the understanding of the conduct of any one state

within the European system.[9] This was a simpler and more cursory version of what became the first book of the *History of Charles V.*[10] It showed clearly that, at a date ten or fifteen years before the publication of the *History of Charles V*, Robertson had already thought out the stages through which sixteenth century states had passed to arrive at a balance of power. Robertson wrote the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* about 1765. In July 1761, he had said in a letter to Lord Cathcart[11] that he had completed a third of the *History of Charles V.* He anticipated that "it will take at least two years to bring that work to perfection."[12] In this, he underestimated the necessary time to finish his book. Four years later, on 8 October 1765, Robertson wrote to Dr. Birch:

> The historical part of the work is finished and I am busy with a preliminary book in which I propose to

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[9]"A thorough knowledge of that general system, of which every kingdom in Europe forms a part, is not less requisite towards understanding the history of a nation, than a acquaintance with its peculiar government and laws" (3:24).

[10]In this scheme, Robertson detailed a progression starting with feudal government. Unified central monarchy created a desire for conquest which necessitated standing armies and taxes to finance them. This led to power for small states and the creation of a balance of power in Italy. As "inconsiderable" states acquired power, the politics of one kingdom inevitably became interwoven with those of another (3:24).

[11]Charles, 9th baron Cathcart (1721-1776), Scottish diplomat and friend of Bute, who acted as an intermediary in patronage matters. Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1755-63, and 1773-1776. Ambassador to Russia, 1768-1771.

[12]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10: 135. McKelvey, "W.R. and Lord Bute", 240.

> gave a view of the progress in the state of society, laws, manners, and arts, from the irruption of the barbarous nations to the beginning of the sixteenth century. This is a laborious undertaking; but I flatter myself that I shall be able to finish it in a few months.[13]

As a result, the *History of Charles V* was not published until 1767. In view of the accusation by John Callander of Craigforth[14], "an intimate friend of Adam Smith . . . who attended . . . the Edinburgh lectures"[15], that Robertson borrowed "the first volume of his History of Charles V from them",[16] the dates are of significance. Robertson could not be accused of borrowing jurisprudential or economic material from any printed source of Smith prior to the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. The Edinburgh lectures, however, were another matter. According to a modern author:

> A considerable proportion of the younger ministers of Edinburgh also attended Adam Smith's lectures. William Robertson . . . was one of these. . . . His interest was in the course of Jurisprudence.[17]

The lectures which Smith gave on Jurisprudence in Glasgow

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[13]D'Israeli, *Miscellanies*, 38.

[14]John Callander of Craigforth (?-1789), Scottish lawyer, who did not practise, but wrote on antiquarian topics. Callander was himself found guilty posthumously of unacknowledged borrowing in his annotations of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. (*D. N. B.*, 3:707)

[15] W. R. Scott, *Adam Smith*, 54.

[16]*Ibid.*, 55.

[17]*Ibid.*, 63. Robertson was not a "minister of Edinburgh" in 1748-1751. His parish of Gladsmuir was some 15 kilometers east of the capital, and was in the Presbytery of Haddington. He visited Edinburgh fairly frequently, which perhaps accounts for the error.

exist in the form of students' notes from 1762-1763, and 1766. Scott cautioned his readers that, "the resemblance (of the Glasgow lectures) to the last course of Edinburgh lectures is close but it should not be pushed too far, since . . . Adam Smith renewed his legal studies after 1752."[18] In Glasgow Smith certainly treated the issue of feudalism and its consitutional effects. In March, 1763 Smith lectured on royal Anglo-Saxon government.

> But the power of the great lords soon destroyed the order and harmony of its severall [*sic*] parts . . . Their lawless and freebooting manner of life also destroyed all the commerce and industry of the former inhabitants, who were obliged to leave the cities and seek . . . protection in the lands of the several lords.[19]

In words totally contrary to Robertson's views, Smith went on to criticize writers who, "seem to think that this change of the allodiall into feudall lands was an usurpation of the nobles . . . But this is altogether a mistake, and was on the other hand an augmentation of the k[ing]s power."[20] Smith's purpose in these lectures was to build up a broad picture of the extension of jurisdictions. In the following lecture he spoke of the growth of the burgh and the emancipation of burghers.

> Trades men naturally choose to live in towns, as they have there a market for their goods and an opportunity of bying [*sic*] those which they stand in

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[18] *Ibid.*, 56.

[19] Smith, *LJ*, 248.

[20] *Ibid.*, 251.

> need of; whereas if they stay in the country, there must be a great loss of time in providing their tools, etc. and going to sell their commodities. But at this time there was little encouragement for manufactures. . . . There were therefore but few of them in the country and very small towns.[21]

Smith was carefully constructing a model of the development of legal and commercial systems during the feudal period. He and Robertson had similar opinions about the general pattern of this development. They had differences, however, such as over the significance of the change to feudal from allodial land holding (2:377 n.8), which Robertson felt strengthened the power of the nobles, and he did not change his views to correspond with those of Smith, even if he had heard Smith lecture before he wrote his own version. For Robertson, the purpose of the material was to illustrate actual political conditions which had historical consequences. The psychological factors often outweighed the economic ones, and the spirit of enterprise was at least as important as factors such as time or markets. Smith was an expert on jurisprudence and economics. The theories which Smith presented publicly were incorporated into history by Robertson. His April 1776 letter of congratulations to Smith on the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* expressed this. Had Robertson felt that Smith disapproved of his usage, he would hardly have suggested ways by which the book might be made easier for reference by scholars:

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[21] *Ibid.*, 256.

> As your Book must necessarily become a Political or Commercial Code to all Europe, which must be often consulted both by men of Practice and Speculation, I should wish that in the 2d Edition you would give a copious index, and likewise what the Book-sellers call *Side-notes*, pointing out the progress of the subject in every paragraph.[22]

He furthermore signed the letter, "Your affectionate and faithfull friend," indicating no coolness between the two men.

Robertson was a careful scholar who incorporated the latest research into his work. A study of the progression of his ideas makes it clear that the historical and political work of Hume as well as the economic and jurisprudential work of Smith influenced him as he advanced in his historical career. Economic societal factors gained greater prominence in Robertson's writing after the *History of Scotland*. The seeds of such ideas were already in his earliest writing, however, and it must be assumed that they were nurtured by the many conversations on socio-economic topics in which Robertson must have participated during the middle years of the century.

Robertson's research into the reign of Charles V involved him in an investigation of the government of the Iberian kingdoms. He was impressed with the political power of the Cortes of Aragon and of Castile at the beginning of the reign (2:53-55). In Castile, in particular, cities played an important role in mitigating the feudal oppression of the nobility. They also had a share in the work of the Cortes. "The genius of the internal government established among the

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[22]Smith, *Correspondence*, 193.

inhabitants of cities, which, even in countries where despotic power prevails most, is democratical and republican, rendered the idea of liberty familiar and dear to them" (2:121). Spain had larger cities than were common in most of Europe; to these the Moors had introduced manufactures and commerce. This trade was "carried on with vigour" (2:56), which encouraged more people to live in the cities. By the early sixteenth century the cities of Spain had considerable power:

> The inhabitants of every city formed a great corporation, with valuable immunities and privileges; they were delivered from a state of subjection and vassalage; they were admitted to a considerable share in the legislature; they had acquired the arts of industry, without which cities cannot subsist; they had accumulated wealth, by engaging in commerce; and being free and independent themselves, were ever ready to act as the guardians of the public freedom and independence. (2:121)

In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith was to make a very similar statement:

> Commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbours, and of servile dependency upon their superiors.[23]

Taxation on land was raised entirely from the third estate; this gave the burghers power over their kings, who needed to raise money for armies. Concessions gained from the crown in this way "not only extended their immunities, but added to their wealth and power" (2:56).

As far as the rest of Europe was concerned, Robertson

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[23]Smith, *WN*, 1:412.

naturally also commented on the commercial power of such cities as Ghent[24], Bruges, which was "the greatest emporium in all Europe" (2:417), and the Hanse group, whose members "formed the first systematic plan of commerce known in the middle ages" (2:32).[25] England and Scotland were seen by him as relatively backward in commercial matters. He explained this with reference to English history (1:279), and said that the situation changed with the loss of Calais in the reign of Mary Tudor, which freed English energies from clinging to continental territory and let them undertake naval and commercial enterprises (2:365-366). He noted that the Castilian Junta in rebellion against Charles V in 1522 had similar grievances to those of the English Commons against the Stuarts (2:123). The Castilians, however, "had acquired more liberal ideas with respect to their own rights and privileges; they had formed more bold and generous sentiments concerning government; and discovered an extent of political knowledge to which the English themselves did not attain until more than a century afterwards" (2:124). Implicit in this passage is the belief that the Castilians had achieved this degree of power

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[24]In 1539, the citizens of Ghent refused to pay their share of costs of war with France, a country "with which they carried on an extensive and gainful commerce". (2:209)

[25]"The Hanseatic League is the most powerful commercial confederacy known in history. . . . The vigorous efforts of a society of merchants attentive only to commercial objects, could not fail of diffusing new and more liberal ideas concerning justice and order in every country of Europe where they settled" (2:417-418).

because of the size of their cities. The lesson of the sixteenth century was to be that such commercial strength and political liberty could be lost to an autocratic king, especially when he was backed by an equally dominant church.

In Robertson's *History of America*, two issues emerged with respect to cities and commerce. The first was the physical descriptions of the great cities reported by the Conquistadores and trade carried on by them. The second was the whole topic of trade between a conquering country and its colonies. In his review of conditions in the great Mexican and Peruvian cities, Robertson was limited by the sources which were available. Little information on commercial subjects was presented in them (1:112). Writing about India nearly twenty years later, his frustration is still evident.

> Even in enlightened ages, when the transactions of nations are observed and recorded with the greatest care, and the store of historical materials seems to be abundantly ample, so little attention has been paid to the operations of commerce, that every attempt towards a regular deduction of them has been found an undertaking of the utmost difficultly. (3:29)

As a result, although the American cities and their social structures are described, there is little depth in the analysis.

In Mexico "the distinction between property in land and property in goods" was understood (1:224). Transfers of each type of property by sale, barter or inheritance were recognised. Cities were of a size comparable to those of Europe, although Robertson felt that the Spanish conquerors

must have exaggerated the number of the inhabitants (1:225).[26] Professions were distinct; Robertson listed those of mason, weaver, goldsmith, and painter.[27] Their various productions were brought into commerce:

> And by the exchange of them in the stated markets held in the cities, not only were their mutual wants supplied, in such orderly intercourse as characterizes an improved state of society, but their industry was daily rendered persevering and inventive. (1:225)

Communications, however, were poor within the empire and trade was further retarded by the lack of a "universal standard by which to estimate the value of commodities" (1:231).

Peru had a more advanced form of agriculture than anywhere else in the Americas in the sixteenth century. Lands were distributed and cultivated collectively by the community, in a system which led to a mild regime quite unlike that either of savage society or the Mexican monarchy (1:237). The Peruvians were on a lower rank of civilization than the

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[26]"From their accounts, we can hardly suppose Mexico, the capital of the empire, to have contained fewer than sixty thousand inhabitants" (1:225). Robertson's incredulity can be placed in the context of his own Scotland, in which, in 1750, there were only five towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants. See T. M. Devine and Rosalind Mitchison, eds., *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. 1, 1760-1830, *A Social History of Modern Scotland*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd. in ass. with The Economic and Social History Society of Scotland), 22. Edinburgh itself, in 1755, had a population of only 52,720. See Bruce Lenman, *Integration, Enlightenment, and Industrialization*, vol 6 of *A New History of Scotland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 3.

[27]Smith saw the American empires as being much less developed. "Their whole commerce was carried on by barter, and there was accordingly scarce any division of labour among them." Smith, *WN*, 221.

Mexicans, however, in spite of the greater elegance of their artistic creations, because Cuzco was the single great city in the land. There was little commerce as a result of the method of land division and the lack of town life. This meant that the people lost a "bond of union and an incentive to improvement" (1:241).

Robertson had to deal with the problem that his rules about the co-existence of commerce and freedom of the individual did not seem to apply in the Americas. He solved this by introducing the question of superstition. Because of the powerful hold which the rulers possessed over their subjects through their quasi-divinity, personal independence was stifled (1:112).[28] For Robertson, any model framework would have exceptions where human beings were concerned. The only constants were vice and virtue, for "manners and customs vary continually" (2:245). It was also clear to Robertson that:

> The character of nations, as well as of individuals, [was] often more distinctly marked by circumstances apparently trivial than by those of greater moment. (1:132)

It would therefore follow that nations would not invariably follow one path of development.

There was a strong relationship between the feelings of Hume, Smith and Robertson on many colonial issues. This was of course the area for which Robertson expressed his debt to

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[28]See also below, 132-137.

Smith in his 1776 letter. His discussion of Mercantilism relied heavily on Smith. The three men all agreed that free trade was of benefit to all, and that restrictions were a burden to a state rather than a protection. Robertson's opinions were frequently more subjective than those of his friends. Human factors were bound up with commercial concerns to him. Thus he defended the kings of Spain from any suggestions that they were motivated by any ill will towards the American people. "The Spanish monarchs . . . . were uniformly solicitous for the preservation of their new subjects" (1:248). His opinion of the good intentions of the Spanish monarchs in South America corresponded to that of Hume, who said, in a much more abstract vein:

> When a monarch extends his dominions by conquest, he soon learns to consider his old and his new subjects as on the same footing; because, in reality, all his subjects are to him the same. . . . He does not, therefore, make any distinction between them in his *general* laws; and, at the same time, is careful to prevent all *particular* acts of oppression on the one as well as on the other.[29]

Smith, on the other hand, was not interested in good intentions; he saw the opportunities for perversion of justice when distances were great. Only the English emerged well from his analysis;

> The government of the English colonies is perhaps the only one which, since the world began, could give perfect security to the inhabitants of so very distant a province.[30]

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[29]Hume, *Essays*, 19.

[30]Smith, *WN*, 2:586.

Mercantilism was a major topic in the *Wealth of Nations*.[31] Robertson too found it increasingly interesting and dealt with it, along with colonial trade generally, in three areas: Spanish America, British America, and India. In Spanish America, Robertson believed that the Conquistadores had behaved not only wickedly, but stupidly. While the "rage and cruelty" of the Spaniards were "temporary calamities, fatal to individuals", their "inconsiderate policy" was "a permanent evil, which, with gradual consumption, wasted the nation" (1:247). America was depopulated by the frantic attempts of the ruling soldiers to mine precious metals. Here Smith and Robertson were in total agreement. Smith spoke of "the savage injustice of the Europeans".[32] Robertson was no less emphatic in his economic condemnation of mining than Smith, and he made it clear that it was both short-sighted and evil.[33] The existence of gold and silver interested the Spanish sovereigns, and as a result the South American colonies became crown property. There were few privileges for the towns that grew up; Robertson said that only local

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[31] *Ibid*, 1:429-451.

[32] *Ibid.*, 1:448.

[33] "When the Spaniards first took possession of their dominions in America, the precious metals which they yielded were the only object that attracted their attention. Even when their efforts began to take a better direction, they employed themselves almost wholly in rearing such peculiar productions of the climate as, from their rarity or value, were of chief demand in the mother country" (1:252). The human cruelty of the individual "unprincipled adventurers . . . have brought disgrace upon their country" (1:248).

jurisdiction was allowed to the citizens (1:250). The Spanish colonies shared characteristics of both Greek and Roman classical types: Greek colonies had been migrations of "superfluous subjects", while Roman ones had been garrisons in conquered lands. Robertson detailed the Spanish policy of Mercantilism, "a system of colonising . . . to which there had been nothing similar among mankind" (1:252). Trade was carried on exclusively with Spain, and no products were permitted which would compete with those of the mother-country. In a passage which quoted from the *Wealth of Nations* and was appropriately footnoted as *Dr. Smith's Inquiry, &. ii. 155.*, Robertson discussed the fantasy of wealth derived from precious metals, and the effect that it had on human endeavours.

> No spirit is more adverse to such improvements in agriculture and commerce as render a nation really opulent. . . . But in the Spanish colonies, government is studious to cherish a spirit which it should have laboured to depress, and, by the sanction of its approbation, augments that inconsiderate credulity which has turned the active industry of Mexico and Peru into such an improper channel. To this may be imputed the slender progress which Spanish America has made . . . either in useful manufactures, or in those lucrative branches of cultivation which furnish the colonies of other nations with their staple commodities. (1:262)

Robertson attributed the decline of Spanish influence to a too rapid expansion of wealth and power, which "overturn[ed] all sober plans of industry" (1:263), and brought about an extravagance of taste. Agriculture and industry declined, and Spain was unable to satisfy the commercial demands of her

colonies. This benefitted Spain's neighbours, and was the direct consequence of her unfortunate monopolistic policies. With all commercial power vested in the Spanish crown, trade was confined to the ships of the two great annual fleets, with the inevitable difficulties of regulation and smuggling. Not that Robertson approved any more of the policies of the other colonial powers. He considered it economically foolish to trade with colonies through an exclusive private company:

> The wit of man cannot, perhaps, devise a method for checking the progress of industry and population in a colony more effectual than this. (1:265)

Book 8 of the *History of America* ended with an extensive review of Spanish commercial practices up to 1772. Robertson displayed great interest in ways whereby the Bourbon kings of Spain could improve their commercial position. Their attempts to revive the prosperity of the nation could not be easily achieved, however, because breaking into any established market presented almost insuperable difficulties (1:272-273).

The final two books of the *History of America* were published posthumously by Robertson's son in 1796. They represented the work which Robertson had completed on the *History of British America*, and which he put aside during the American Revolution, pending a resolution of the conflict. Under the Tudors, "naval skill, knowledge of commerce, and a spirit of enterprise" caused the English to open "several new channels of trade" (1:231). From this time on, royal support encouraged explorations in various directions, and plans were

made for colonization. In the seventeenth century, the growing colonies were subjected to the provisions of the Navigation Acts. These, Robertson felt, were the root of all the later differences between England and her colonies.

> On one side of the Atlantic these regulations have been extolled as an extraordinary effort of political sagacity, and have been considered as the great charter of national commerce, to which the parent state is indebted for all its opulence and power. On the other, they have been execrated as a code of oppression, more suited to the illiberality of mercantile ideas than to extensive views of legislative wisdom. (1:304)

Trade and expansion continued in spite of the regulations, and of fluctuations in the price of Virginia tobacco. Robertson once more commented on the ill effects of companies governing colonies.

> The mercantile spirit seems ill adapted to conduct an enlarged and liberal plan of civil policy, and colonies have seldom grown up to maturity and vigour under its narrow and interested regulations. (1:300)

The New England colonies owed their birth to religious divisions, and Robertson concentrated on this aspect of their foundation, ending his report on them in 1652, without having reviewed their trading patterns.

The *Consideration of the Progress of Trade* with India was a major element in Robertson's last book, published in 1791. His thinking on the subject was summarized there, along with his gratitude to a beneficent Creator[34] who had placed him on

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[34]"The original station allotted to man by his Creator was in the mild and fertile regions of the East. There the human race began its career of improvement; and from the remains of sciences which were anciently cultivated . . . we may conclude

earth at the best possible place and time.

> Thus the commercial genius of Europe, which has given it a visible ascendant over the three other divisions of the earth, by discerning their respective wants and resources, and by rendering them reciprocally subservient to one another, has established a union among them, from which it has derived an immense increase of opulence, of power, and of enjoyments. (3:India 48)

Robertson contrasted the trade carried on with India with American commercial affairs. The Portuguese earned great rewards from their eastern trade, which was "a simple mercantile transaction" (3:India 49). To those who thought that such a trade, paid for in gold and silver, would impoverish the European countries involved, Robertson explained that precious metals should rather be thought of themselves as articles of commerce. According to Smith, "the precious metals are a commodity which it always has been, and still continues to be, extremely advantageous to carry from Europe to India."[35] By such trade, new industry was created, from which "the nation reaps all the benefit", and is in fact, enriched (3:India 49). The wealth of the Americas swelled the commercial coffers of Europe, allowing increased trade with the east. As the Dutch and English grew more powerful, they drove out the Portuguese from the most profitable routes in order to attain their later commercial and naval power. With increased trade, luxury goods became cheaper, which made their

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it to be one of the first countries in which men made any considerable progress." (3:India 1)

[35]Smith, *WN*, 1:224.

use more widespread, and thus further increased the general profits.

Commerce, for Robertson, had an international value in producing mutual knowledge and peace (2:32). In this he expanded on views published by Hume in 1742. In one of his Essays, Hume had said that "nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy".[36] A similar opinion was stated by Robertson in the early pages of the *History of Charles V*. He, however, added a political dimension to his discussion. Practical merchants were not concerned with national biases or prejudices. Their common need to preserve continuous trading routes led to a disposition towards peace which influenced the actions of state governments. Robertson was a leader in this point of view. Hume had only written of the economic advantages of international trade.[37] In the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith would later speak of the establishment of an "equality of force" which would create respect and justice. He considered that it would come from "that mutual communication of knowledge and of all sorts of improvements which an extensive commerce from all countries to all countries . . . necessarily, carries along

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[36]Hume, *Essays*, 119.

[37]*Ibid.*, 330. "The emulation among rival nations serves rather to keep industry alive in all of them."

with it".[38] Robertson believed that he could see this force in action in European history. Allied to it, he saw the influence of religion; a potent force for both liberty and commerce.

[38]Smith, *WN*, 2:627.

6. THAT HAPPY ECCLESIASTICAL CONSTITUTION

William Robertson was born in a manse; he was a parish minister for all his adult life. When, in the early 1760s, it would have been financially possible for him to give up his living in order to write, he opted to remain in the church. A statement, co-signed by Robertson and several of his friends in 1752, spoke of "that happy ecclesiastical constitution which we glory in being members of, and which we are resolved to support".[1] This text, although it related to purely clerical affairs, was a strong statement of belief in an ordered Protestant Christian community. The group averred that, "by joining together in society, we enjoy many advantages, which we could neither purchase nor secure in a disunited state."[2] They went on to say that the Church of Scotland "was not merely a voluntary society, but a society founded by the laws of Christ".[3] This was the creed by which Robertson lived. His ideal society was ordered, "polished", and obedient to divine law. His public and private life was lived in accordance with this conviction.

An ingrained Presbyterian faith was an essential part of Robertson's existence. For an eighteenth century rationalist,

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[1]"Reasons of Dissent", 1752, Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:233.

[2]*Ibid.*, 10:232.

[3]*Ibid.*, 10:233.

however, who disapproved of enthusiasm,[4] religion must never be intrusive.[5] Rather it should be the foundation of all his work: pastoral, administrative, academic, and literary. Religion was "the great source of consolation amidst the calamities of life" (1:124). The Reformation, in Robertson's opinion, had contributed "to increase purity of manners, to diffuse science, and to inspire humanity" (2:368). These values were the inspiration for his life and work. Robertson saw himself as an enlightened modern man, who studied to give his history a scientific basis on sound philosophical doctrines. So successful was he in this, that Black, who wrote a chapter on Robertson, could speak of Robertson's Reformation as "mechanical, external, and without substance".[6] A review of Robertson's approach to religion both in his personal life and his histories will counter this argument and show that his beliefs formed a consistent, vigorous, and

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[4]This word was always used in a pejorative sense by Robertson. In the section in Charles V in which Robertson described the wild antics of Anabaptists in Münster in 1534-1535, "enthusiastic rage" produced devastation (2:182), "enthusiastic zeal" was followed naturally by "violent effects" (2:184), and "excesses of enthusiasm" led to "sensual gratifications" (2:184).

[5]Robertson fully understood the difference between the sixteenth century and his own day. Of the fanaticism of the participants at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, he commented that "zeal for religion took possession of the minds of men, to a degree which can scarcely be conceived by those that live in an age when the passions excited by the first manifestation of truth, and the first recovery of liberty, have in a great measure ceased to operate" (2:176).

[6]J. B. Black, "Robertson" in *The Art of History* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1926. Reprint 1965), 140.

substantial core which motivated all his actions.

The Moderate faction of the Church of Scotland, of which Robertson was the leader for twenty years, believed that the church was best served by an educated, restrained and socially conscious body of clergy. The patronage debate centred on ensuring livings for such men. In 1759, Robertson spoke clearly in the *History of Scotland* about the civil position of churchmen. He had been speaking of the jurisdictional exemptions of the Catholic clergy, and how in the 1580s the Reformers sought similar privileges from James VI:

> If that same plea had now been admitted, the protestant clergy would have become independent on the civil magistrate; and an order of men extremely useful to society, while they inculcate those duties which tend to promote its happiness and tranquillity, might have become no less pernicious, by teaching, without fear or control, the most dangerous principles, or by exciting their hearers to the most desperate and lawless actions. (3:175)

Robertson obviously saw the role of the minister as that of the moral leader in modern society. Ethics were the preserve of the Church, but they must be transmitted within the laws of the state. Brougham emphasised this aspect of Robertson's preaching:

> His notions of usefulness, and his wish to avoid the fanaticism of the High Church party (what with us would be called the Low Church, or Evangelical), led him generally to prefer moral to theological or Gospel subjects.[7]

This preference was clear in the *History of Charles V*, where Robertson specifically stated that he did not consider

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[7]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 269.

theology his field of competence. In his consideration of the situation of the Catholic Church at the time of Luther, he discussed political and intellectual movements, as well as the corruption of the clergy and the Curia. He said, however:

> I have avoided entering into any discussion of the theological doctrines of popery, and have not attempted to show how repugnant they are to the spirit of Christianity, and how destitute of any foundation in reason . . . leaving those topics entirely to ecclesiastical historians, to whose province they peculiarly belong. (2:108)

Principles of "usefulness" were dominant in Robertson's pastoral life as well as in his histories. That these should have seemed of vital importance to Robertson does not negate the fundamental Christian roots of his utilitarianism.

Robertson's peers were unanimous in testifying to the Christian nature of his life. Brougham said that "the purity of his blameless life, and the rigid decorum of his manners, made all personal attacks upon him hopeless."[8] Of his final days, his old, and usually caustic, friend, Carlyle reported:

> He appeared more respectable when he was dying than ever he did even when living. He was calm and collected, and even placid, and even gay. . . . His house, for three weeks before he died, was really an anticipation of heaven.[9]

In committee and in debate, Robertson acted as peace-maker. Consensus was his goal, and was generally achieved by him.

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[8] *Ibid.*, 265.

[9] Alexander Carlyle, *The Autobiography of Dr. Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk 1722-1805*, edited by John Hill Burton (London: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 576.

His university colleague, Dugald Stewart testified that:

> The good sense, temper, and address with which he presided for thirty years in our University meetings, were attended with effects no less essential to our prosperity, and are attested by a fact, which is perhaps without a parallel in the annals of any other literary community, that during the whole of that period there did not occur a single question which was not terminated by an unanimous decision.[10]

Those who sat in the Church Assembly with him for twenty years gave him equal credit. His personal friend, but political opponent, Dr. John Erskine explained how:

> He guided and governed others, without seeming to assume any superiority over them: and fixed and strengthened his power, by often, in matters of form and expediency, preferring the opinions of those with whom he acted to his own.[11]

Robertson's admiration for moderation and tolerance can be further seen in the issues in which he interested himself outside the administrative fields of his professional life.

Toleration, Catholic Relief, the anti-slavery movement, and better treatment of native peoples were concerns which featured in Robertson's public life, in his correspondence, and in his published work. His religious attitudes were muted, in his dealings with these matters, but they formed the core of his personality, and caused him to espouse such issues. Thirty years after his death, a biographer considered Robertson's tolerant attitudes important to mention:

> Dr. Robertson conduced to . . . introduce an impartial exercise of the judicial authority of the church, and

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[10]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:196.

[11]*Ibid.*, 10:192.

> to diffuse the principles of tolerance among men who had hitherto prided themselves on their utter contempt of them.[12]

It was clear that, in the General Assembly, Robertson's principles constituted a radical change from the past. It might be remembered that only twenty-five years before Robertson's birth, a student was hanged for blasphemy in Scotland.[13] This judicial murder might be seen as justifying Hume's words that "toleration is none of the virtues of priests in any form of ecclesiastical government."[14] It was, however, a virtue that appeared frequently in Robertson's writing. In contrast to the more cynical Hume, Robertson referred to the past in a tone of pained surprise:

> In our age and nation, to which the idea of toleration is familiar, and its beneficial effects well known, it may seem strange, that a method of terminating their dissensions, so suitable to the mild and charitable spirit of the Christian religion, did not sooner occur to the contending parties. (2:330)

This was not an area where the "contrariety of our sentiments . . . in religion and politics"[15] divided the two men. Persecution of any kind inspired their contempt. Robertson

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[12]R. A. Davenport, in "Life of Dr. Robertson" in *The Works of Dr. W. Robertson*, 10 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1826) 1:lxxiv.

[13]Thomas Aikenhead (?1678-1697) had uttered anti-Christian sentiments in a bar in 1696. He was hanged in accordance with the anti-blasphemy laws, in spite of his full recantation.

[14]David Hume, *History of England*, 6 vols. (London, 1752-1762, reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty*Classics*, 1983-1985), 2:379.

[15]McKelvey, "W.R. and Lord Bute", 240.

could write of his own country, in words almost as strong as those of Hume[16], that, "the Reformers were persecuted with all the cruelty which superstition inspires into a barbarous people" (3:30). He regretted that the Reformers themselves lacked toleration both in Scotland and in Germany, although he could understand why this was so. Toleration was a "humane principle" in British North America (1:317). Members of the Dominican Order were commended for their attempts to ameliorate the lot of the Indians in Hispaniola when:

> In conformity to the mild spirit of that religion which they were employed to publish . . . [they] condemned the *repartimientos*, or *distributions*, by which [the native Americans] were given up as slaves to their conquerors, as no less contrary to natural justice and the precepts of Christianity than to sound policy. . . . and even refused to absolve, or admit to the sacrament, such of their countrymen as continued to hold the natives in servitude. (1:70)

Robertson appeared to believe that any religion was good if it adhered to the spirit of natural justice. To the end of his life, Robertson's feelings remained the same. In 1791, he quoted with approval a letter from the "Rajah of Joudpore to Aurengzebe" which spoke of the essential unity of the great faiths, and contained the words: "To vilify the religion and customs of other men, is to set at naught the pleasure of the Almighty" (3:India 103).

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[16]Hume wrote of the reign of Mary Tudor: "England was soon filled with scenes of horror, which have ever since rendered the catholic religion the object of general detestation, and which prove, that no human depravity can equal revenge and cruelty, covered with the mantle of religion." Hume, *History*, 3:435.

Robertson tried to give a practical application to his tolerant opinions in 1779, when he supported the repeal of the Scottish penal laws against the Catholics. In 1778 a Roman Catholic Relief Act had been passed in England, and the following year the Government proposed to extend this to Scotland. As usual, religious and secular considerations mingled in Robertson's support. "I considered [the bill] . . . no less beneficial to the nation, than suitable to the spirit of the Gospel," he said to the General Assembly in 1779.[17] In this, however, he mistook the temper of his compatriots; the Edinburgh populace took exception to the idea of Catholic relief. The Scottish capital, like Paris among others, was "particularly susceptible to riot"[18] in the eighteenth century, especially when grain prices were high. In the disturbances which followed the introduction of the bill, Robertson and his family were forced to take refuge in Edinburgh Castle, while the mob threatened his house.[19] Sadly Robertson advised the Government that the time was not ripe in Scotland for this measure. His speech to the Assembly went on to say:

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[17]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:187-188.

[18]Lenman, *Integration*, 20.

[19]Sher, *Church and University*. 289-290. It is perhaps relevant to a discussion of Robertson's personal religion to use a quotation given by Sher from the speech to the Assembly. Robertson had received an anonymous death threat of which he said that "what had irked him most of all . . . was the fact that 'it was in the name of *Jesus* I was warned that my death was resolved.'" *Ibid*, 293.

> While I thought a repeal of the penal statutes would produce good effects, I supported it openly; when I foresaw bad consequences from persisting . . . I preferred the public good to my own private sentiments."[20]

He was not totally discouraged in his efforts to eliminate civil disabilities based on religion. When, in May 1791, Gilbert Elliot[21] moved the repeal of the Test Act as far as it applied to Scotland[22], he had the support of Robertson. Stewart gave the text of two letters (dated 17 March 1791, and 28 May 1792) from an Anglican bishop, Dr. Douglas,[23] in reply to letters from Robertson endorsing the bill currently before Parliament. Douglas wrote that the "liberal sentiments of the clergy of the Established Church of Scotland" had received mention in the debate, and he was confident that the measure would now be passed. This confidence was misplaced, and the bill was defeated. It is clear that in his correspondence as well as in his works, Robertson interested himself in matters of toleration right up to his final illness. Indeed, in his second letter, the Bishop hoped that Robertson had "perfectly

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[20]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:191.

[21]Gilbert Elliot (1751-1814). lawyer and politician, was the son of the Gilbert who had attended Assembly parties with the young Moderates. He became first earl of Minto, and married Robertson's granddaughter, Mary Brydone.

[22]Donald Grove Barnes, *George III and William Pitt, 1783-1806* (1939. Reprint New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), 222.

[23]John Douglas (1721-1807), Scottish clergyman of the Church of England, who was en exhibitioner at Balliol College, Oxford, with Adam Smith. Bishop of Carlisle, 1787, Bishop of Salisbury, 1791.

recovered from [his] late indisposition", which was probably the onset of his terminal jaundice.[24]

The treatment of other races by Europeans was a subject to which Robertson was alerted through his researches. He scorned the self-satisfaction of Europeans faced with people on a lower scale of civilization.

> Unfortunately for the human species, in whatever quarter of the globe the people of Europe have acquired dominion, they have found the inhabitants not only in a state of society and improvement far inferior to their own, but different in their complexion and in all their habits of life. Men in every stage of their career are so satisfied with the progress made by the community of which they are members, that it becomes to them a standard of perfection; and they are apt to regard people whose condition is not similar with contempt, and even aversion. (3:India 74)

His work on American history made him fully aware of this form of human depravity. Eighteenth century writers had held that man in a savage state was either noble or degenerate. Robertson had too subtle a mind to see man in a primitive state as necessarily being either happier or worse than civilized man. With scientific detachment, he cautioned his readers:

> Without indulging conjecture, or betraying a propensity to either system, we must study with equal care to avoid the extremes of extravagant admiration, or of supercilious contempt for those manners which we describe. (1:93)

He felt that the American Indians must have been "of gentle temper" (1:121) to live communally in long houses peacefully.

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[24]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*7, 10: 237-238.

Such people had no defence against well-armed invaders[25], who, when they did not kill the indigenous people outright, forced them into hard and unaccustomed labour. He was genuinely horrified at the cruelties perpetrated by European invaders of all nations. His American researches opened his eyes to the mistreatment of native peoples, as well as their actual extermination (1:60. 1:181, 1:208). The attitude of the Spaniards to the native people they defeated was influenced by the fact that they believed themselves to have a mission to spread the Catholic faith. Those natives who accepted conversion were promised the same treatment as other subjects of the King of Spain (1:332 n.23). Those who refused would be slaves. Robertson could neither understand nor accept the racial disdain shown by the Spaniards to the indigenous peoples of America.

> They conceived the Americans to be animals of an inferior nature, who were not entitled to the rights and privileges of men. In peace they subjected them to servitude. In war they paid no regard to those laws which . . . regulate hostility, and set some bounds to its rage. (1:58-59)

Robertson quoted, with understanding sympathy, the words of Hatuey, a West Indian chieftain condemned to the stake for rebellion (against his Spanish conquerors). When told that, if he converted to Christianity, he would go to heaven with "good" Spaniards, Hatuey replied, "The best of them have neither worth nor goodness: I will not go to a place where I

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[25]"A conflict with timid and naked Indians was neither dangerous nor of doubtful issue" (1:46).

may meet with one of that accursed race" (1:64).

Although many British colonial efforts were founded on commercial premises, racial attitudes were still a problem. The expressed purpose of Robertson's *Historical Disquisition on India*, written in his old age, was to attempt "to render more happy" (3:India 75) the condition of the people of that continent, by teaching the British something of Indian history and culture. Once again, it was evident that Robertson was distressed at the colonial attitudes of Europeans, this time his fellow countrymen.

Just how close to home these attitudes were prevalent, was demonstrated by the career of Andrew Dalzel's brother, Archibald, who was professionally involved in the slave trade.[26] Rice showed that the Select Society debated the question of slavery at several meetings, once, in July 1761, at the request of Robertson himself.[27] In spite of this intellectual disapproval of the institution of slavery, however, educated Scots continued to be participants in the trade. Marriage connections joined the Robertsons and the Dalzels, but William and Andrew did not speak out against Archibald's activities.[28]

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[26]C.Duncan Rice, "Archibald Dalzel, the Scottish Intelligentsia, and the Problem of Slavery", *Scottish Historical Review* 52 (1983), 121-136.

[27]*Ibid.*, 128.

[28]Rice showed Archibald Dalzel to have been a rather unsuccessful slave trader. He met the intellectual expectations of his class in 1793, however, by publishing the

Whatever Robertson may have felt about individual slavers, he preached and wrote against slavery generally. According to Stewart, in Robertson's published sermon of 1755, "his own sentiments on that subject were eloquently stated."[29] These sentiments were also clear in *America*, where the subject of slavery is tackled more than once. Slavery was "a system of oppression so repugnant to the spirit of religion" (1:70) that the Dominicans protested against it. The Portuguese slave trade was "an odious commerce, which had been long abolished in Europe, and which is no less repugnant to the feelings of humanity than to the principles of religion" (1:73).[30] Dugald Stewart's biography of Robertson gave a tantalising glimpse of an involvement in the English anti-slavery movement. Stewart printed two letters[31] to Robertson from William Wilberforce[32]; the first, dated 25 January 1788, asked for practical information on "the poor

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[29]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:240.

[30]Robertson was on occasion guilty of plagiarising from himself! He re-used this phrase exactly in his *Historical Disquisition on India* about the slave trade. "In this practice, no less repugnant to the feelings of humanity than to the principles of religion, the Spaniards have unhappily been imitated by all the nations of Europe. . . . At present the number of negro slaves in the settlements of Great Britain and France in the West Indies exceeds a million" (3:India 48).

[31]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 240-241.

[32]William Wilberforce (1759-1833), English politician with a life-long committment to humanitarian issues, especially the abolition of slavery.

Negroes" for use in parliamentary debate, and particularly for facts about the Jesuit institutions in Paraguay. With rather ponderous humour, Wilberforce complained about having to write to Robertson when "an application to my bookseller ought to have supplied [the information]." It is not clear whether he meant that the *History of America* was out of print, or whether he felt Robertson ought to have provided more published material. By answering the letter, however, Robertson could make "a sort of expiation for [his] offence." The second letter, dated 20 February 1788, thanked Robertson for "your packets by the post, as well as . . . your Sermon." Robertson must have complied with the request for information with commendable speed for three communications to be sent between London and Edinburgh within four weeks. Wilberforce ended the second letter with a hope that they might cultivate a further acquaintance. This brief connection with one of the foremost Christian activists of the age is another indication of the way in which Robertson's own faith determined his humanitarian interests. New, in his biography of Henry Brougham, said that Robertson "provided the inspiration for Brougham's humanitarian drive."[33] He did this through his life and work, but also because he had "declared boldly that slavery was inconsistent with Christianity."[34] Robertson may

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[33]Chester W. New, *The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 2.

[34]*Ibid.*, 2, 23.

thus be seen to have had a significant influence on the men who worked to wipe out slavery from the British Empire.[35]

It is possible to identify Robertson as a forerunner of Buckle[36] and even of Weber[37] in his opinions about the role of religion in human society. Robertson saw that mens' belief systems could be potent forces for stagnation or for progress.

> True religion is as different from superstition in its origin, as in its nature. The former is the offspring of reason cherished by light and improvement. Ignorance and fear give birth to the latter, and it is always in the darkest periods that it acquires the greatest vigour. (3:India 67-68)

The same human instincts which led to commercial expansion also led to reformed and participatory opinions in religion. In Scotland:

> The most ardent love of liberty accompanied the protestant religion throughout all its progress; and wherever it was embraced, it roused an independent spirit, which rendered men attentive to their privileges as subjects, and jealous of the encroachments of their sovereigns. (3:52)

To Robertson liberty and Protestantism were inextricably linked, as were superstition and autocratic government. Hume

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[35]New interpreted Brougham's approach to religion as essentially that of Robertson. "He always appreciated religion as a social dynamic and appreciated it most when it was eminently reasonable in character as had been the religion of his Scottish Presbyterian forebears and his great-uncle Robertson." *Ibid.*, 126.

[36]Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894, from the second London Edition).

[37]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons, introduction of Anthony Giddens (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930. Reprint, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1985).

had been the leader in Scotland in theorizing along these lines.[38] Robertson gave concrete historical examples of the links. The Dutch, rising up against the Hapsburgs, fought for their independence, and became a "state, founded on liberty, and reared by industry and economy" (2:370). Of Zwinglius, in Zürich, Robertson wrote,

> being animated with a republican boldness, and free from those restraints which subjection to the will of a prince imposed on the German reformer, he advanced with more daring and rapid steps to overturn the whole fabric of the established religion. (2:99)

Robertson anticipated many of Buckle's views about the relationship between superstition and lack of freedom and progress. Seventeenth century Presbyterianism was "one of the most detestable tyrannies ever seen on the earth" to Buckle.[39] Luckily:

> The political activity which produced the rebellion against the Stuarts, saved the Scotch mind from stagnating, and prevented that deep slumber into which the progress of superstition would naturally have thrown it.[40]

This was a sentiment which corresponded closely to Robertson's comment about the citizens of Magdeburg:

> As they were animated with that unconquerable spirit which flows from zeal for religion co-operating with the love of civil liberty . . . they prepared to defend themselves with vigour. (2:293)

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[38]Hume had written that "superstition is favourable to priestly power," and that "superstition is an enemy to civil liberty." Hume, *Essays*, 75, 78.

[39]Buckle, *History*, 2:322.

[40]*Ibid.*, 2:323.

"The reformation is one of the greatest events in the history of mankind; and, in whatever point of light we view it, is instructive and interesting" (3:40). This was the scientific, objective view of religious events of which Black disapproved. It was, however, the approach which led Robertson very nearly to the conclusions of Weber about the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. He saw the connection between the enterprising Crusaders and trade, between the Arab Moslems and commerce; in each case, religious "vigour" brought along with it enterprise in other fields.

> The same commercial spirit or religious zeal which prompted the Mahomedans of Persia to visit the remotest regions of the East;, animated the Christians of that kingdom. (3:India 28)

Robertson did not draw any distinction between one religious sect and another in this respect. Rather, any religion, in an "active" phase, could stimulate other endeavours. Nor did he speak of a Lutheran "calling", but he was strongly aware of the active temporal life of the good Protestant. The free cities of the Empire, where Protestantism took firm root, were "small republics, in which the maxims and spirit peculiar to that species of government prevailed." Their "reigning principles" were "the love of liberty, and attention to commerce" (2:64). Such citizens were truly the industrious Protestants who saw their "calling" to struggle in the world. This long quotation from the *History of Charles V* expressed Robertson's feelings about the invigorating effects of the new

faith:

> The reformation, wherever it was received, increased that bold and innovating spirit to which it owed its birth. Men who had the courage to overturn a system supported by every thing which can command respect or reverence, were not to be overawed by any authority, how great or venerable soever. After having been accustomed to consider themselves as judges of the most important doctrines in religion, to examine these freely, and to reject, without scruple, what appeared to them erroneous, it was natural for them to turn the same daring and inquisitive eye towards government, and to think of rectifying whatever disorders or imperfections were discovered there. As religious abuses had been reformed in several places without the permission of the magistrate, it was an easy transition to attempt the redress of political grievances in the same manner. (2:153)

Contrasts of religious spirit matched contrasts of social development. Contrasts and parallels co-existed throughout the work of Robertson. Superstition and despotism were balanced against protestantism and liberty.

Thus in Scotland "popery . . . was of the most bigoted and illiberal kind . . . the power and wealth of the church kept pace with the progress of superstition" (3:41). Across the Atlantic, in America, "the spirit of subjects could not have been rendered so obsequious, or the power of rulers so unbounded, without the intervention of superstition" (1:112).

As examples of superstitious religions Robertson cited "Popery", some native American faiths and Islam. In contrast, Protestantism and Brahmin Hinduism represented more sublime faiths. It was part of Robertson's progressive linear view of world history to see religion as part of the whole cultural dynamic of a people. As a minister, Robertson naturally

stated that he knew "with infallible certainty" (1:85) that all men had a single source. The further progress of the race, however, was hard to follow. "Even among the most enlightened people, the period of authentic history is extremely short; and every thing prior to that is fabulous or obscure" (1:85). To compensate for some of these obscurities, deductions drawn from one societal area might be applied to another:

> By knowing the adventures and attributes of any false deity, we can pronounce, with some degree of certainty, what must have been the state of society and manners when he was elevated to the dignity. (3:India 69)

When Robertson studied any nation, he looked at their religious practices as a yard-stick to measure their cultural development, even when the information at his disposal seemed flawed.

> The human mind, even where its operations appear most wild and capricious, holds a course so regular, that in every age and country the dominion of particular passions will be attended with similar effects. The savage of Europe or America . . . trembles alike with fear, or glows with impatience. He has recourse to rites and practices of the same kind, in order to avert the vengeance which he supposes to be impending over him, or to divine the secret which is the object of his curiosity. (1:87)

Robertson saw a close connection between an advanced state of society and an abstract philosophy of religion. The human mind was "enlarged by science and illuminated by revelation" (1:123) to form the conception of a Deity; the savage, on the other hand, had only rites which have the "object to avert evils which men suffer or dread" (1:124). Superstitious

religions had the effect of further enslaving an already oppressed populace; advanced religions supported civil freedom. Terror was the basis of the power of superstitious religions. Robertson wrote that, among the uneducated in India, "every act of religion, performed in honour of some of their gods, seems to have been prescribed by fear" (3:India 69). In America, "a perfect despotism, with its full train of superstition, arrogance and cruelty, is established among the Natchez" (1:111). In Turkey, the supremacy of the ruler produced "the despotic system of the Turkish government, founded on . . . illiberal fanaticism." resulting in "the most illiberal and humiliating servitude that ever oppressed polished nations" (3:India 50).

Heavenly intervention played a very small role in Robertson's ideas. In his 1755 Sermon he had explained that Christ came into the world at the most propitious moment. He reiterated this in the *History of Charles V.* He went on to remark that the reformers of the sixteenth century were ordinary men[41], who must have been protected by "the same hand which planted the Christian religion" (2:93). By and large, however, Robertson saw men as being in charge of their own fates. "The Almighty carries on the government of the universe by equal, fixed and general laws," which exclude

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[41]Robertson said of Luther: "The knowledge of truth was not poured into his mind all at once, by any special revelation; he acquired it by industry and meditation, and his progress, of consequence, was gradual" (2:101).

miracles and divine interference in the affairs of men (2:22). What was more important to Robertson was the Reformation as a source of expanded horizons for mankind. It opened the windows of mens' souls, and cleared out the papist cobwebs from their minds, so that they could go forward into a new free world as full citizens of states with some form of democratic government. The German Imperial cities exemplified this spirit. They were free, Protestant, and commercial:

> These small commonwealths, the citizens of which were accustomed to liberty and independence, had embraced the doctrines of the reformation when they were first published, with remarkable eagerness; the bold spirit of innovation being peculiarly suited to the genius of free government. . . . Having been taught to employ their own understanding . . . they thought that they were . . . qualified . . . to judge for themselves. (2:281-282)

In sixteenth century Scotland "the inquisitive genius of the age pressed forward in quest of truth" (3:37), fighting against the superstition of the Catholic past.

Cheerful, optimistic Robertson generally looked on the bright side of events. He could write about horrors only because he sincerely believed that the world was progressing to a point at which such things would no longer happen. The Reformation had served to purify the Catholic Church as well as to create the Protestant churches. It gave Robertson "peculiar satisfaction" to see that religious strife could have a "salutary or beneficial effect" (2:368). His admiration for utility allowed him to approve any faith which had a high moral tone and which trusted in an afterlife. He

believed implicitly that truth had only to be demonstrated to prevail. At the outset of his career, he said apropos the Scottish Reformation, "Truth needed only a fair hearing to be an overmatch for error" (3:30). Thirty years of active life did not produce any change in this creed. In the *Historical Disquisition on India*, he noted again that, "a free and full examination is always favourable to truth, but fatal to error" (3:India 70).

7. STYLE, SOURCES AND SCHOLARSHIP

In the *History of America*, William Robertson created his definition of the historian's task. "The great qualities of an historian," he stated, were "that patient industry in research which conducts to the knowledge of truth . . . [and] that impartiality which weighs evidence with cool attention". There must be no eagerness "to establish . . . [a] favourite system"; more a solicitude "to discover what was true than to relate what might appear splendid" (1:352). Robertson tried sincerely to live up to the standards which he had set for historians. He did as much research as he could; he tried to be totally unbiased; he had no single system to which history should conform.

Throughout Robertson's works, there was a sense of development from academic history to "conjectural history". To Höpfl, "Robertson's *History of America* moves with astonishing facility between conjectural and narrative, document-based history".[1] Both historical methods were present to some extent in all the books, but their emphasis changed. Robertson's attempts "to discover what was true" led him into greater speculation in his later work than he could have anticipated at the beginning of his career. At that

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[1]H. M. Höpfl "From Savage to Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment," *The Journal of British Studies* 17,2 (1978), 21.

stage, Robertson emphasized the priority of the "dignity of history". Stewart was followed by Black in attributing this doctrine to Robertson.[2] In the *History of Scotland* Robertson wrote disdainfully of the personal background and qualities of David Rizzio, and of his role in the life of Mary Stuart.[3] The "fortune" which brought him to prominence in Scotland "obliges history to descend from its dignity, and to record his adventures" (3:91). When history performed a serious utilitarian social role in informing the public about the errors of the mighty and the process by which liberty and good government could be secured, the lives of such adventurers as Rizzio seemed extraneous to the main theme. Stewart explained the importance which his generation placed on eliminating from history matters "which fall under the provinces of the antiquary, and of the writer of memoirs."[4] Robertson grudgingly found it necessary to include Rizzio, although he

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[2]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:176, Black, *Art of History*, 131.

[3]David Rizzio (?1533-1566), an Italian musician from Piedmont, became French secretary to Mary Stuart in 1564. As a result of the Queen's favour, "he discovered, in all his behaviour, that assuming insolence, with which unmerited prosperity inspires an ignoble mind" (3:91). (Robertson here displayed both his Presbyterian rigidity about the work ethic, and his middle-class social attitudes.) Mary's husband, Henry Darnley, was persuaded by a group of rebellious nobles that Rizzio was Mary's lover. He led them into the pregnant Queen's presence to commit murder. This indignity totally killed Mary's waning love for her husband, and in a sense was thus responsible for leading her into the series of events that brought about her downfall.

[4]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:176.

clearly felt that such characters rightly belonged in 'memoirs' rather than in histories. As a historian, however, Robertson matured with each book, and learned to widen his scope to allow the less exalted their rightful places in the story of the past. He discovered that historical continuity included the lives of the humble as well as of the mighty. By the time that he came to write the *History of America*, he had embraced with enthusiasm the "science of man". This, and his belief in the progress of society, had broadened his vision. His history now had less "dignity", and was instead more concerned with such human factors as the sexual relationships between the sexes, and the treatment of women by men.

The literary style in which Robertson wrote was measured and classical. This matched the nature of the content, particularly at the outset of his historical career. The language in which the message of the past was presented, ought to be commensurate with its didactic function in the present. The following example of Robertson's early mannered style, with its alliteration, complicated syntax and allusive imagery was typical of the writing in the *History of Scotland*, which was much admired by contemporaries:

> Mary's sufferings exceed, both in degree and in duration, those tragical distresses which fancy has feigned to excite sorrow and commiseration; and while we survey them, we are apt altogether to forget her frailties; we think of her faults with less indignation; and approve of our tears, as if they were shed for a person who had attained much nearer to pure virtue. (3:194)

The function of language and style was to reinforce the

content of a historical work. Often a group of simple sentences was followed by a complex one to emphasise a point. The episode of the murder of Rizzio is an example of the technique. Darnley has entered the Queen's supper chamber:

> Three or four of his most trusty accomplices followed him. Such an unusual appearance alarmed those who were present. Rizio instantly apprehended that he was the victim at whom the blow was aimed; and, in the utmost consternation, retired behind the queen, of whom he laid hold, hoping that the reverence due to her person might prove some protection to him. (3:101)

According to Stewart, Robertson's prose became "less uniformly polished" in his later works, and he even introduced "idiomatic phrases".[5] A reader is likely to become bemused by reading the clauses of this sentence:

> By this fortunate coincidence of events, whereof Pizarro could have no foresight, and of which, from his defective mode of intercourse with the people of the country, he remained long ignorant, he was permitted to carry on his operations unmolested, and advanced to the centre of a great empire before one effort of its power was exerted to stop his career. (1:190)

This may have been the lack of polish to which Stewart referred. Robertson's editing also became less careful and favourite expressions were overused. In the *History of America*, for instance, the words "habitable globe" appeared four times in the first quarter of the book (1:8, 1:17, 1:48, 1:82) along with various similar usages, "terrestrial globe", "habitable earth". (1:1) Anything idiomatic, however, is well hidden from a modern reader, who is only able to track down

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[5] *Ibid.*, 10:177.

neologisms such as "copartnery" (1:52).

A classical vocabulary and language structure were the chosen usage of a man for whom Latin was a spoken language, but whose everyday tongue was Scots.[6] Like Hume, Robertson was particularly careful to write in a classical style in order to avoid anything which might offend English ears as a "Scotticism".[7] Robertson was a good linguist[8], and did as much of his research as possible in the original language. In 1759, he wrote to Dr. Birch, "I am sufficiently master of French and Italian; but have no knowledge of the Spanish or German tongues."[9] Peardon claimed that Robertson read, French, Italian and Spanish.[10] Robertson's Spanish was presumably learned specifically for his work on Charles V and the American explorers.[11] Peardon's deprecatory comment that

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[6]Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:268.

[7]See Hume, *Letters*, 1:297, 1:299, 2:194.

[8]A 1788 letter from Adam Smith to a clerical correspondent, assumed by the editors to be Robertson, introduced "three Spanish Gentlemen". Smith explained, "You are . . . by far the best modern linguist among us, and I, therefore, have taken the liberty to give you this trouble." Smith, *Correspondence*, 316.

[9]D'Israeli, *Miscellanies*, 37.

[10]Thomas Preston Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760-1830. Studies in History, Economics and Public Law #390*, edited by the Faculty of Political Science of Columbia University (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), 24.

[11]It is likely that Robertson's fluency improved as he worked. Duckworth has proved, from the borrower's register of the Edinburgh University Library, that in 1770, Robertson was using an English translation of Herrara's American history.

"he did not take the trouble to learn German"[12] seems unfair. A man as busy as Robertson could hardly have been expected to master a language with a different root from the Romance languages which he knew.

Over a span of forty years, Robertson wrote one minor and three major books. In spite of his other professional tasks, he spent years researching each of his works. The number of authors mentioned in Robertson's books was indicative of his extensive reading. His researches delved into material from as early as classical authors to as modern as Montesquieu and Hume. In the *History of Scotland* much of the source material was purely Scottish, but there were references also to classical, French, and English works. In only one book did Robertson include a bibliography[13], but he carefully cited the sources for his text as footnotes in all his works.[14] The *History of Charles V* and the *History of America* drew on wider sources, original when possible. Much of the narrative came from writers contemporary with the events described.

Mark Duckworth, "An Eighteenth-Century Questionnaire: William Robertson on the Indians", *Eighteenth Century Life* 11 [1] (1987), 44-45, n.12.

[12]Peardon, *Transition*, 24.

[13]In the *History of America*.

[14]The references tend to be in a short form. Robertson made the assumption that any reader interested enough to pursue the references would be familiar with the authorities whom he cited.

Thus Guicciardini[15] was the base for Italian information on Charles V, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo[16] provided material on Cortes and Mexico.

Robertson's reading was done in various places. The Advocates Library in Edinburgh was a research site for Robertson, as it had been for Hume. Further material was found in the Edinburgh University Library, the British Museum, in papers in private hands, and in archives in foreign capitals. He was fully aware of the supreme value of primary sources. After these, he used secondary materials, but he carefully rated their reliability.[17] Robertson developed a network of friends who searched archives and questioned politicians on his behalf. Three examples of these correspondents will demonstrate Robertson's methods; his local friends, his diplomatic acquaintances, and Scots resident abroad.

In his researches for the *History of Scotland*, Robertson drew on private collections in the possession of various

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[15]Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540), Italian statesman and author of *History of Italy*, which dealt with the years 1492 to 1534.

[16]Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1496-1584), Spanish soldier who accompanied Cortes to Mexico. He wrote his *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* in his old age at his home in Guatemala.

[17]See *History of America*, n.97, 1:351-352, for his rating of the Spanish historians of the New World. See also *History of Charles V*, n.43, 2:434-436, for a discussion on why Robertson chose not to follow a secondary source.

acquaintances. One of these was Sir David Dalrymple[18], who was of particular assistance with reference to the Gowrie Conspiracy[19]. Stewart published several letters from Robertson to Dalrymple, in which specific information was requested.[20] In the Preface to the book, Robertson thanked several other gentlemen for the use of "original papers" from their libraries. In the small world of Edinburgh scholarship, it must have been relatively easy to discover who had such documents and to gain access to them. It is notable, however, that Robertson made every effort to find appropriate material. He remarked in his Preface that, had he printed all the documents to which he had referred, his volume would rival in size those of the antiquaries. He had, however, contented himself with including "a few of the most curious" (3:iv).

When Robertson came to research the *History of America*, he discovered that many of the manuscripts, which he would have liked to use, were unavailable in printed form. He therefore went to considerable lengths to find documents to use to prove his points, and to cite these in his text.

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[18]David Dalrymple (1726-1792), Scottish lawyer, raised to the bench as Lord Hailes. His strong Christianity made him disapprove of Hume. He wrote extensively on religious and antiquarian topics.

[19]A curious affair which took place in 1600. The young Earl of Gowrie and his brother persuaded James VI to visit their castle on the spur of the moment. James claimed that he was then threatened with death by a man in armour, and the brothers were killed when the King called for help.

[20]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:209-213.

> Describing the achievements and institutions of the Spaniards in the New World, I have departed in many instances, from the accounts of preceding historians, and have often related facts which seem to have been unknown to them. It is a duty I owe the Public to mention the sources from which I have derived such intelligence which justifies me either in placing transactions in a new light, or in forming any new opinion with respect to their causes and effects. (1:iii)

Robertson was acquainted with Lord Grantham, the ambassador to Madrid at the time he was researching the Spanish expeditions to America. Lord Grantham used the Spanish speaking embassy chaplain, the Reverend Robert Waddilove[21] "to take the conduct of my literary inquiries in Spain" (1:iii). The chaplain must have had light official duties, from the amount of work which he did for Robertson. At any rate, in the Preface to the *History of America*, the historian expressed his deep gratitude for the material which Mr. Waddilove had sent to him.

Robertson had a second diplomat for an old friend. On his behalf, Sir Robert Murray Keith[22] requested the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria for permission to search for papers related to Cortes in the Imperial library in Vienna.[23]

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[21]Robert Darley Waddilove (1736-1828), chaplain to the British Embassy in Madrid, 1771-1779, Dean of Ripon, 1791. He remained a friend of Robertson; Stewart printed a letter to him dated 1778, in which Robertson reviewed American affairs and writing projects. Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:162-163.

[22]Robert Murray Keith (1730-1795), Scottish soldier and diplomat, son of Ambassador Keith, a friend of all the Edinburgh *literati* from 1762 to his death in 1774.

[23]"I made diligent search for a copy of this despatch, both in Spain and in Germany, but without success" (1:351).

Robertson considered such letters to be vital primary sources:

> The letters of Cortes to the Emperor Charles V. are an historical monument, not only first in order of time, but of the greatest authenticity and value. (1:351)

Although the particular letter which he sought was not discovered, Robertson received a copy of another original document as well as drawings of "those curious Mexican paintings" (1:iv) which he published in his book.

In St. Petersburg Robertson had yet another contact, this time one of the ubiquitous Scottish doctors, the Imperial physician, Dr. Rogerson. Robertson had formed the opinion that the American continent might have been peopled from the North-West via the Bering Straits. He wished to obtain Russian documentation for this theory. To his delight, Catherine II "instantly ordered the journal of Captain Krenitzin, who conducted the only voyage of discovery made by public authority since the year 1741, to be translated, and his original chart copied for my use" (1:iv). As a result, Robertson was indeed able to present his theory of the origin of the inhabitants of the Americas; a view which was an enormous step forward from the fantasies of earlier writers.

Robertson appended to his books much of the apparatus of modern scholarship. He made it clear in his prefaces that he wanted readers to be able to check his references and replicate his research to prove his points. All citations of commonly known sources were noted at the bottom of his pages. He considered this a vital part of good writing, and

criticized others for not doing so.[24] Duckworth counted the footnotes to Book 4 of the *History of America*. He found 619 references to about thirty books. This uncertainty was explained by the multiple nature of some of Robertson's footnotes, and the "erratic" way in which he cited titles.[25] In spite of his flaws of method, Robertson was a model for his time in this respect. Discussions on the value of sources, and rationales for theories were placed in end-notes to the volumes. The *Appendix, Proofs and Illustrations*, or *Notes and Illustrations* which Robertson appended to his books provided insights into his methodology. He intended to produce a clear narration which the reader could follow easily. In the *History of Scotland*, it was possible to develop the theme chronologically because of its unity. The later books presented multi-dimensional subjects, forcing Robertson to abandon simple narrative techniques and instead base each section of the book on a hero-figure, on geography, or on culture. Since readers such as Wesley had objected to any diversion from pure political history, the use of appendices allowed Robertson to keep them to a minimum. The end-notes in his books gave him a method of incorporating digressions from the main text, which he believed would interest scholars, and of adding corroboratory details which, in the main narrative,

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[24]E.g. Voltaire, see quotation above, 42, and Smith, see quotation above, 104.

[25]Duckworth, "Eighteenth-Century Questionnaire", 42, and 45 n.28.

would delay the casual reader.

> The chief intention of these notes was to bring at once under the view of my readers such facts and circumstances as tend to illustrate or confirm what is contained in that part of the history to which they refer. When these lay scattered in many different authors, and were taken from books not generally known, or which many of my readers might find it disagreeable to consult, I thought it would be of advantage to collect them together. (2:412)

This methodology was controversial in Robertson's day. According to Stewart, Robertson himself believed that the end-notes were "an improvement of considerable importance in historical writing."[26] Stewart went on to mention that a contrary view was held by Smith, who "considered every species of note as a blemish or imperfection; indicating, either an idle accumulation of superfluous particulars, or a want of skill and comprehension in general design."[27] Dr. Douglas felt that notes should be closer to the text, "at the bottom of the pages to which they refer."[28] This would clearly be impractical for many of Robertson's extremely lengthy notes, while it was reasonable for Gibbon's short ones. Hume had complained to his publisher, William Strahan, about Gibbon's usage in the first edition of the *Decline and Fall*:

> When a note is announced, you turn to the End of the Volume; and there you often find nothing but the Reference to an Authority: All these Authorities ought only to be printed at the Margin or the Bottom

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[26]Stewart, *Life of W.R.* 10:169.

[27]*Ibid.*, 10:169-170.

[28]*Ibid.*, 10:170.

of the Page.[29]

Pressure such as this persuaded Gibbon to move all his notes to the bottom of his pages, but according to a letter printed by Stewart, he had "often repented of . . . [his] compliance."[30] Stewart himself was in agreement with Smith on this issue where the more "speculative" digressions in the histories were concerned:

> A considerable portion of the matter which is parcelled out among the notes, ought to have been incorporated with the text.[31]

Robertson's solution to the problem, citing textual references as foot-notes and extra illustrative material as end-notes, did not please everyone. It was, however, a well thought-out and well executed attempt to increase the pleasure and edification of the reader. By making the text as smooth as possible, Robertson let the student be carried along by the uninterrupted story. Afterwards, if he wished, the reader could turn to the *Notes* and investigate for himself the bases for some of the author's conclusions.

The first and longest of Robertson's end-notes was his *Critical Dissertation concerning the Murder of King Henry, and the Genuineness of the Queen's Letters to Bothwell*, in his *History of Scotland*. His stated intention, in accordance with his usual practice in cases of opposing theories, was "to

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[29]Hume, *Letters*, 2:313.

[30]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:171.

[31]*Ibid.*, 10:172.

assist others in forming some judgment concerning the facts in dispute, by stating the proofs produced on each side" (3:231). The alternatives presented by Robertson were either, that the Earl of Bothwell arranged the murder of Henry Darnley, second husband of Mary Stuart, with or without the Queen's complicity, or, that "the earls of Murray, Morton and their party" organised the death (3:231). The guilt of Bothwell was the more probable. Robertson sifted through all the evidence which suggested this, as well as that against Murray and Morton, and reached a verdict against Bothwell. From this point he went on to consider whether or not Mary Stuart was a co-conspirator. This seemed to depend, among other factors, upon the genuineness of the Casket Letters, allegedly from Mary to Bothwell, the originals of which vanished during the reign of James VI[32], and the belated manner in which the Scottish nobles in power in 1567 produced the letters. Robertson deduced logical political grounds for the latter fact. As for the letters themselves, Robertson demonstrated from other letters that the language used was similar to that employed by Mary in her correspondence. He discounted the fact that they were in various translations, and he considered the strongest evidence of their genuineness to be the fact

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[32]These letters were seen by many in both Scotland and England between 1567-1584. No definite judgment was ever made as to whether the handwriting of the French originals was that of Mary. Translations were made into Latin, Scots and English. None of the letters were dated; they had neither salutations nor signatures. Conclusions drawn from them were therefore highly conjectural.

that, in them, Mary never actually admitted guilt. As Robertson said:

> No maxim seems more certain than this, that a forger is often apt to prove too much, but seldom falls into the error of proving too little. (3:242)

The long letter written from Glasgow, which most suggested Mary's complicity, was felt by Robertson to be genuine from the internal evidence of known private circumstances of which a forger would be unaware. Robertson completed his review by offering his readers a choice of Bothwell guilty, with Mary an accessory before the fact, or Bothwell guilty, with Mary shielding him after the murder. It was clear that Robertson felt that the evidence suggested Mary's complicity before the fact. In 1985, Villius published a paper in which he came to much the same conclusion as Robertson. He believed that the long Glasgow letter was genuine, and that the enemies of the queen used the information which it contained to create other evidence against her.

> Mary's enemies showed notable skill in using a genuine document whose very failure clearly to convict Mary rendered it credible, and in then . . . clinching matters with one-sided accounts and positive forgery.[33]

Thus, two hundred years on, Robertson's position was supported by a modern scholar.

To strengthen or supplement documentary and published evidence, Robertson followed seventeenth and eighteenth

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[33]Hans Villius, "The Casket Letters: A Famous Case Reopened," *The Historical Journal* 23,3 (1985), 517-534.

century practice by developing questionnaires to elicit information from his correspondents. In the Preface to the *History of America* he explained that his questionnaire had been translated into Spanish and used by Dr. Waddilove in Madrid. "M. le Chevalier de Pinto, the minister from Portugal to the court of Great Britain" also gave "me very full answers to some queries concerning the character and institutions of the natives of America" (1:vi-v). Finally, answers were received from prominent French sources through M. Suard, the translator of *Charles V*. Duckworth has studied the replies which were received, and has suggested that Robertson was unwilling to challenge authoritative printed sources with the new evidence.[34] Robertson's self-confidence in his abilities as a historian was not strong enough for him to employ his information to the fullest extent to create a new picture of America. Although "he was skilled at finding documents and solving questions of fact", he "did not create new explanations for the historical developments he outlined."[35] The answer to Duckworth's paradox may lie in the intellectual environment in which Robertson worked. The Scottish inquiry into the science of man had excited Robertson with its

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[34]Robertson's own words may be of interest in this context: "The usual method of forming an opinion concerning the comparative state of manners in two different nations, is by attending to the facts which historians relate concerning each of them" (2:387). It was thus hard for him to reject totally anything upon which past historians had agreed.

[35]Duckworth, "Eighteenth-Century Questionnaire", 43.

challenge. The theories of the men whom he admired could be substantiated through the history of America. The replies which he received were used for this purpose, along with the written secondary sources at his disposal. Perhaps it would be accurate to say that in this Robertson fell victim to his faith in his friends' work, and in his own craft was guilty of establishing a "favourite system".

Anthropologists, however, have given Robertson more credit for his conclusions on America. They have not necessarily agreed with Black's statement that:

> It was futile to attempt a comprehensive account of aboriginal customs until the evidence had been properly collected, sifted, and arranged by competent ethnologists.[36]

In an article published in 1960, Hoebel concluded that Robertson "gave the world its first comprehensive ethnology of the Americas and, at the same time, laid a number of solid foundations for later development of anthropology."[37] Hoebel was particularly impressed with Robertson's treatment of the origin of the American Indian people; a view with which Black concurred:

> A flood of light was thereby thrown on American origins, and what had been a purely speculative inquiry became once again rationalized into a question of fact.[38]

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[36]Black, *Art of History*, 135-136.

[37]E. Adamson Hoebel, "William Robertson: An 18th Century Anthropologist-Historian", *American Anthropologist* 62 (1960), 655.

[38]Black, *Art of History*, 138.

Hoebel also admired Robertson's conception of the cultural development of groups in terms of psychology and behavioural characteristics. He believed that, of the writers on the stadial theory of society, "none saw it so clearly in empirical terms or treated the problem with such a close approximation of the natural science approach as did Robertson."[39]

This approach can be seen in Robertson's consideration of women as real, and in many ways, equal human beings. A devoted husband, Robertson's statement of the importance of love was a tribute to a happy marriage.

> That passion which was destined to perpetuate life, to be the bond of social union, and the source of tenderness and joy, is the most ardent in the human breast. (1:94)

He was equally caring for the welfare of his sisters and his daughters, although his expectations for them were limited to those of his day.[40] In Carlyle's words, "Tho' not very complaisant to Women, he was not Beyond their Regimen";[41] meaning that Robertson was susceptible to female influence. His character sketch of Mary Stuart is that of a man who

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[39]Hoebel, "Wiliam Robertson", 654-655.

[40]Robertson took care of his younger sisters after the deaths of their parents in 1745; their education delayed his own marriage. When he refused to move to London in 1761, one of his reasons was that social life was more difficult and expensive in London. In Edinburgh, "women of Middling fortune mingle with good company" easily, and so might meet suitable young men. Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:107-108,136.

[41]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 145.

appreciated women, both for their charm and for their abilities:

> To all the charms of beauty, and the utmost elegance of external form, she added those accomplishments which render their impression irresistible. Polite, affable, insinuating, sprightly, and capable of speaking and of writing with equal ease and dignity. Sudden, however, and violent in all her attachments, because her heart was warm and unsuspicious. . . . Formed with the qualities which we love, not with the talents that we admire; she was an agreeable woman, rather than an illustrious queen. (3:194)

Robertson's review of the "union of the sexes" in the *History of America* is equally sympathetic, while more theoretical. He believed that "a general state of promiscuous intercourse between the sexes" had never been the rule. Some form of contract between men and women must always have existed, "either as perpetual or only as temporary" while their offspring needed care. In spite of this, in the savage state, "the condition of women was "equally humiliating and miserable!"

> Whether man has been improved by the progress of arts and civilization in society, is a question which, in the wantonness of disputation, has been agitated among philosophers. That women are indebted to the refinements of polished manners, for a happy change in their state, is a point which can admit of no doubt. To despise and to degrade the female sex is the characteristic of the savage state in every part of the globe. Man, proud of excelling in strength and in courage, the chief marks of pre-eminence among rude people, treats woman, as an inferior, with disdain. (1:103)

The care with which eighteenth-century writers of history read each published work, and the frequent letters which they exchanged, allowed them to pass on advice and encouragement as

well as criticism. This, along with the comfort provided by his wife, supported Robertson. He wrote to Gibbon in 1777, "I have taken much pains to obtain the approbation of those whose good opinion one ought to be solicitous to secure."[42] In a 1776 letter to Strahan, Robertson admired Gibbon's writing and accuracy.

> I have traced him in many of his quotations, (for experience has taught me to suspect the accuracy of my brother penmen,) and I find he refers to no passage but what he has seen with his own eyes.[43]

In the preface to the *History of America*, he reflected on the need to produce evidence for any claims made about the distant past. He paid a further tribute to Gibbon's qualities as a historian, and said that he was including a "catalogue" of Spanish books, which might not be known to English speaking readers, in response to a "hint" from his friend. This was the only formal bibliography compiled by Robertson. He commented that "in the present, it may . . . be deemed . . . ostentation" (1:v). This may explain why he did not continue the practice in his final book.

Hume wrote many helpful letters to Robertson. His correspondence contains guidance about correct English,[44]

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[42]Gibbon, *Misc. Works*, 2:200-201.

[43]*Ibid.*, 2:159-160.

[44]David Hume, *New Letters of David Hume*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 45, (hereafter cited as *NL*).

suggestions for changes of factual errors[45], congratulations[46], names of possible translators[47], and new topics for histories[48]. Robertson did not always follow the advice given; he refused to make some of the changes which Hume suggested, and he certainly did not accept this opinion about:

> Your project of the Age of Charles the Fifth. That subject is disjointed; and your hero, who is the sole connection, is not very interesting. A competent knowledge at least is required of the state and constitution of the Empire; of the several kingdoms of Spain, of Italy, of the Low Countries; which it would be the work of half a life to acquire; and, tho some parts of the story may be entertaining, there would be many dry and barren; and the whole seems not to have any great charms.[49]

Perhaps he took these comments as a challenge that he could "acquire" this knowledge in less that "half a life." As has been shown earlier, he believed that he could complete the task in a shorter time than the decade which it eventually required.

Other authors added their praises in letters. Edmund Burke particularly admired Book 4 of the *History of America*

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[45]Hume, *Letters*, 1:289, 291.

[46]*Ibid.*, 1:297-299,200,302.

[47]*Ibid.*, 1:307.

[48]*Ibid.*, 1:315.

[49]*Ibid.*

for teaching the "knowledge of human Nature."[50] He said that Robertson had "employd Philosophy to judge on Manners."[51] Writing to thank Robertson for a copy of the *History of America*, Horace Walpole spoke of the merits of contemporary historians, and of Robertson's books carrying on "the chain of genius."[52]

The compatibility of the Edinburgh group of writers may be seen in their friendly mutual criticism, and in their habit of editing each other's productions. From his earliest days as an author, Robertson was careful to have others check his work. A letter to Sir David Dalrymple, in 1758, asked for comments on the Preface to the *History of Scotland*:

> I send it to you, not only that you may do me the favour to correct any inaccuracies in the composition, but because there is a paragraph in it which I would not presume to publish without your permission, though I have taken care to word it so modestly that a man might have said it of himself.[53]

The next year Hume wrote to Robertson:

> You are at present the best Critic in Britain of my Performance; as I am perhaps of Yours; and if

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[50]Edmund Burke, *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, July 1774-June 1778*, edited by George H. Gutteridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 3:351.

[51]*Ibid.*

[52]Horace Walpole, *Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Vol. 15, edited by W. S. Lewis, Charles H. Bennett, and Andrew G. Hoover, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, edited by W. S. Lewis (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 15:136.

[53]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:210. The paragraph in question thanked Dalrymple both for the loan of papers and for instruction about the Gowrie Conspiracy.

> Entreaties can prevail on you to make you be particular in your Remarks on me, I would not spare them: If the Promise of a reciprocal Censure will do, I make you the same Promise.[54]

This habit of comradely editing continued to the end of Robertson's life. When, in 1792, Professor Andrew Dalzel approached his Principal about a proposed volume of the Sermons of his father-in-law and Robertson's cousin by marriage, Dr. John Drysdale, the response was positive. Robertson detailed the method which he and his colleagues had employed in a letter to Dalzel:

> I will read them [the sermons] with the utmost attention, and put down on paper every observation, great and small, which occurs to me, while you have full liberty to adopt or to reject or alter them as you think best. This is what Dr. Blair and I have always done for one another in every work we have published; and by going over your MSS. in the same manner, I flatter myself that I may contribute somewhat towards rendering the work more nearly such as our worthy friend would have wished it to be, especially as I am more accustomed to theological ideas and style than you are.[55]

The congruence of the ethical and educational ideology of all these men made their mutual criticism tolerable and accordingly of major assistance. When their philosophical and historical opinions differed, they had no difficulty in countenancing, if not adopting, opposing viewpoints because of the similarity of what Smith would have called their "moral sentiments".

As a result of the advice and assistance of his friends,

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[54]Hume, *NL*, 46.

[55]Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:96.

and of his own research and scientific methods, Robertson produced histories which met the standards which he had set for himself. As his historical sense grew with his expanded knowledge of the past, he came to realise that historical dignity was not confined to political facts and dynastic rivalries. There was a majesty in the progress of mankind from his most primitive state to the Christian present. Bagehot said that the *Wealth of Nations* was "an immense design of showing the origin and development of cultivation and law; or . . . of /saying how, from being a savage, man rose to be a Scotchman".[56] Robertson would have endorsed this description of the work of the Scottish scientists of man. There was great social utility in this endeavour, as well as religious zeal. Furthermore, Höpfl found "a purely academic and disinterested love of reconstructing and making sense of the past", in the works of the Scottish conjectural historians.[57] This was Robertson's motivation; it produced notable results and helped to create a more literary and scholarly British school of history.

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[56]Bagehot, *Collected Works*, 3:91.

[57]Höpfl, "From Savage to Scotsman", 32.

8. CONCLUSION

In a 1797 letter, Alexander Carlyle told the story of a dream, induced by over-eating, in which:

> I had a view of Elysium, [where] . . . the first group I perceived was David Hume, and Adam Smith, and James Macpherson,[1] lounging on a little hillock, with Col. James Edmonstone[2] standing before them, brandishing a cudgel, and William Robertson at David's feet in a listening posture. Edmonstone was rallying David and Smith, not without a mixture of anger, for having contributed their share to the present state of the world; the one, by doing everything in his power to undermine Christianity, and the other by introducing that unrestrained and universal commerce, which propagates opinions as well as commodities. . . . Robertson rose to his feet, and seemed to be in act to speak one of his decisive sentences in favour of the winning side. . . . when [I was] jerked . . . back into life again, not without regret at being disappointed in meeting with so choice a company.[3]

This wistful vision is that of a man who had outlived many of his contemporaries, and who disapproved of the world in which he now found himself. The days in which he now lived were, he said in 1795, "these times of sedition and mutiny".[4] The Moderates had lost their hold on the Church, the world was at war, and dangerous opinions were rampant. His description of

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[1]James Macpherson (1736-1796), Scottish writer, and forger of the Ossianic epic. Friend of John Home, he was given critical support by Blair. Even Hume was taken in initially by his poetry.

[2]James Edmonstone of Newton, soldier and friend of David Hume.

[3]Carlyle, *Autobiography*, ed. Burton, 574-575.

[4]*Ibid.*, 581.

Robertson "in a listening posture" at the feet of his philosophic friends, however, rang true, as did the belief that the historian was about to utter a "decisive" statement for "the winning side". In spite of his well-known conversational brilliance,[5] Robertson knew when to listen to the ideas of others. As Carlyle remarked, "Robertson's translations and Paraphrases on other People's thoughts, were so Beautifull and so harmless, that I never saw any Body Lay claim to their own."[6] From reading and listening, he gleaned not merely conversational gambits, but also philosophical guidelines for historical writing.

Robertson was perfectly aware of the talents which he possessed; he was equally appreciative of the genius of his friends, and the uses to which a historian could put their theories. The successful administrator in Robertson assisted the scholar to enlarge the nature of historical composition in

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[5]"Robertson was in great spirits and shone prodigiously in conversation, which he almost wholly engrossed; the prodigious flow of his eloquence and his admirable good sense excused the importance he assumed." Dalzel, *History of the University*, 1:23.
"I never knew a man of such pleasing talents for conversation as Dr. Robertson: He spoke, as became him, a good deal; but there was nothing assuming or authoritative either in the manner of the mater of his discourse. He took every opportunity of calling on his hearers for their share of the dialogue,--of asking their opinion or information on the subject of it, and introduced such topics as gave opportunities for his asking such information or opinions." Mackenzie, *Life of John Home*, 55-56.

[6]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 148. Carlyle added that there was one occasion when Robertson repeated so often a story about an event, of which he had been told, that he deluded himself into believing that he had been present.

the latter half of the eighteenth century. The pattern had been set by Voltaire for a universal, philosophical model of history. As written by Voltaire and Montesquieu, however, history was often general and allusive. To Robertson, with his practical, inductive mind, it was essential to construct a foundation of fact for the building of speculative positions. From this came his innovative combination of objective narrative and subjective analysis. The culminating inquiry into the commercial policy of the Spanish government with its colonies in the *History of America* deserves to be remembered for the political and economic good sense which it displayed. Eighteenth century readers appreciated such a synthesis, and bought Robertson's books in their many editions.

The great success with which Robertson's histories were received in the intellectual climate of Europe in the decades before the French Revolution is an indication of how perfectly they met the current expectations of the reading public. Readers whose appetites for philosophical history had been whetted by Voltaire, and whose interest in wider cultural influences had been stimulated by Montesquieu, were avid for further explanations of the world in which they lived. Robertson's analysis of how the sixteenth century European states-system emerged, and of how that world in turn fathered the politics of the eighteenth century, was exactly to their taste. Krieger, writing about the introduction to the *History*

of Charles V, said that it "was intended to show how, out of raw and primitive beginnings, the forces arose which made a civilized and enlightened world possible".[7] Each of Robertson's books contained just such explanations. In the *History of Scotland*, the aim was limited to British factors, in the *History of Charles V*, the focus became European, and in the *History of America*, Robertson reviewed the history of the forces shaping all civilized mankind. Reading these discourses, the British could congratulate themselves on their own good fortune in having the best constitution in the world; other nationalities could study the developments which Robertson expounded.

That Robertson was indeed widely read in Europe is evident from the number of translations made of his works into different languages. Voltaire's words in 1778, "Je me joins à l'Europe pour vous estimer,"[8] spoke for many in the small international intellectual community. Thirty years after Robertson's death, a continental visitor called Scotland, "noble terre de Wallace, de Bruce et de Robertson."[9] Although Robertson may seem a rather unlikely member of such a triumvirate, he would have appreciated being numbered with the

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[7]Leonard Krieger in "Series Editor's Preface", *The Progress of Society in Europe*, edited by Felix Gilbert, *Classic European Histories*, edited by Leonard Krieger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), vii.

[8]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:143.

[9]Horn, "Principal Robertson", 161.

great patriotic heroes of his nation.

The correspondence between Hume and Robertson contained many details of the French recognition of their work. In May 1759, Hume spoke of an interest that the Abbé Prévost[10] had expressed in translating the *History of Scotland*.[11] This came to nothing, but further discussions on the merits of translators took place in letters in 1763 and 1768.[12] Baron d'Holbach[13] also concerned himself in the search for a suitable translator for the *History of Charles V* because, as he said, "such an interesting subject deserves undoubtedly the attention of all Europe."[14] The works of both Hume and Robertson were consequently well known in France because of the rapid translations which were made after publication in England. Those who understood English read them even more quickly, as is clear from a letter from Voltaire to Robertson dated February 1778, thanking him for a copy of the *History of America*.

The *History of Charles V* was translated into German in an edition published in 1781. The *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, however, had been translated into German

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[10]Antoine-François Prévost (1697-1763), French writer, who was translating Hume's *History of England under the Stuarts*.

[11]Hume, *Letters*, 1:307-308, see also Hume, *NL*, 55.

[12]Hume, *Letters*, 1:415-416, 2:193.

[13]Paul Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach (1723-1789), French *philosophe* and *encyclopédiste*.

[14]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:220.

nine years earlier by Ludwig Heinrich von Nicolay, a tutor to the Grand Duke Paul, son of the Empress Catherine II of Russia.[15] Nicolay simplified and paraphrased the material to use as a teaching tool for the seventeen year old prince. Robertson's reputation in Russia was high. In 1783, he was elected a foreign member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences at St. Petersburg. Catherine herself had read both the *History of Charles V* and the *History of America*, the former being "le compagnon constant de tous mes voyages."[16]

Translations appeared in various Italian cities, where Robertson was compared with Vico.[17] Robertson was elected a foreign member of the Academy of Sciences at Padua in 1781.[18] Although his religious views were sometimes censored, his work on feudalism aroused much interest. Venturi has demonstrated how enlightened Italians looked to Scottish writers to provide "not only a historiographic model, but also an example of political moderation."[19] Hume, Robertson and Ferguson would have been delighted at the use to which their work was

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[15]Edmund Heier, "William Robertson and Ludwig Heinrich von Nicolay, His German Translator at the Court of Catherine II", *Scottish Historical Review* 41 (1962), 135-140.

[16]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:231.

[17]Franco Venturi, "Scottish echoes in eighteenth-century Italy" in *Wealth and Virtue. The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment*, edited by Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 356.

[18]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:231.

[19]Venturi, "Scottish Echoes", 361.

being put in Italy.[20]

Initially, Robertson was greeted with approval in Spain. In 1777 he was elected a corresponding member of the Royal Academy of History in Madrid for services to Spanish history, perhaps because of the interest in his work by the President of the Academy, the conde de Campomanes.[21] Plans were made to translate the *History of America* into Spanish, and the work had commenced, when the Spanish government decided that this would be "inexpedient" and ordered it stopped.[22] Robertson's book was banned in Spanish America, and seen as a "source of corruption" to youth everywhere.[23] The Spanish government, however, decided that a Spaniard should write a history from the official records, and this led to the collection of the archives and "the foundation in 1784-5 of the great Archivo General de Indias."[24] It was fitting that Robertson's influence should lead to the collection of documents to make research easier for later historians.

For half a century, editions of Robertson's books flowed

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[20]Humphreys noted that a new Italian translation of the *View of the Progress of Society* was published as recently as 1951, proving continuing Italian interest in Robertson's work. R. A. Humphreys, "William Robertson and his *History of America*", *The Canning House Annual Lecture* (London: Hispanic and Luso-Brasilian Councils, 1954), 12.

[21]Humphreys, "W.R. and his *History of America*", 25-26.

[22]Stewart, *Life of W.R.*, 10:159.

[23]Humphreys, "W.R. and his *History of America*", 26-27.

[24]*Ibid.*, 27.

from the presses of Europe and America. Horn, writing of Robertson's continuing influence, noted that:

> It was mainly owing to William Robertson that English historical writing advanced step by step with the advance of German historiography in the later eighteenth century and came to realise the fundamental problems of the European states-system and its colonial extension to other continents.[25]

Only with the new scholarship and interpretations of nineteenth century historiography created by historians such as Prescott in America, Ranke in Germany, and Maitland in England, was Robertson's history superseded. His influence on other literary and scientific fields has been even longer lasting.

There is an intriguing sidelight to the study of Robertson's use of sources and his picture of America, which draws attention to the significance of history writing to other forms of literature in the eighteenth century. Modern scholars have researched the degree to which Robertson himself became a source to others. His greatest influence seems to have been on writers on America, on both sides of the Atlantic. In an paper written in 1944, Briggs discussed Robertson as a geographical and historical source for John Keats. He saw the *History of America* as the inspiration for the natural imagery in several of Keat's poems. Briggs cited sources proving that Keats had read Robertson's *America* twice.

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[25]Horn, "Principal Robertson", 167-168.

It formed an antidote to any "Rousseauistic ideas"[26] which Keats had hitherto possessed. Robertson's descriptions of cold, cheerless, windy regions were used by Keats in various poems written around 1818-1819, while the story of the Spanish conquests formed the basis for *Chapman's Homer*, although Keats substituted Cortes for Balboa.

A decade later Stimson studied the effects which Robertson had on late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers in the United States.[27] Many editions of Robertson's books constituted virtually the only sources for the history of Spanish America in the period. The early American poet, Joel Barlow, took his facts for *The Vision of Columbus* (1787) from Robertson's work, as did the later William Gilmore Simms in his *The Vision of Cortes* (1829). With the histories of Washington Irving (1828), and William Hickling Prescott (1847), American readers finally had other sources than Robertson upon which to rely. Brougham, and later Black, compared Robertson's and Irving's treatment of the first sight of land by Christopher Columbus, and agreed that the latter was "worse written"[28] and "tawdry"[29]. Black made another

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[26]Harold E. Briggs, "Keats, Robertson , and *That Most Hateful Land*", *Publications of the Modern Languages Association* 59 (1944), 197.

[27]Frederick S. Stimson, "William Robertson's Influence on Early American Literature", *Americas* 14 (1957-8), 37-43.

[28]Brougham, *Lives of Men of Letters*, 1:296.

[29]Black, *Art of History*, 125.

comparison between Robertson and Prescott in the passage describing Cortes' first sight of Mexico, with similar results. Robertson's work was "plain homespun", but it reproduced accurately the chronicle source of Bernal Díaz del Castillo while Prescott's narrative was "a subjective effusion."[30] Stimson pointed out the parallels between American views of the Spanish and the British as oppressors. He particularly mentioned Robertson's influence in painting a heroic picture of Columbus, and of contributing to the "black legend" of Spanish wickedness, and to the picture of the "noble savage". This was not a strictly accurate depiction of Robertson's work. Humphreys made the point that Robertson "shocked" contemporaries by his "refusal to accept what has come to be called the 'black legend'."[31] His Columbus was certainly a hero figure, and, although he disapproved of the cruelty of many Spaniards, Robertson strove to clear the names of the Spanish monarchs from imputations of ill-will towards their American subjects.[32] His American natives, however, were by no means all "noble savages", rather they were total human beings, possessed of both virtues and vices. Their behaviour generally reflected the level of advancement of the

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[30]*Ibid.*, 128.

[31]Humphreys, "W.R. and his *History of America*", 21.

[32]Stimson admitted that "Robertson loved facts too much to dwell at length on the black picture", and quoted from the Spanish historian Julain Juderias that Robertson was "mas imparcial que sus predecesores." 41.

society from which they sprang.

Robertson and his circle were fascinated by the study of man's upward struggle towards eighteenth century European civilization.

> Mankind, when in their rude state, have a great uniformity of manners; but when civilized, they are engaged in a variety of pursuits. . . . While communities admit, in their members, that diversity of ranks and professions which we have already described, as the consequence or the foundation of commerce, they will resemble each other in many effects of this distribution.[33]

So Adam Ferguson reasoned about the progress of man into a civilized condition. Robertson formulated the same thought in much clearer prose:

> The characters of nations depend on the state of society in which they live, and on the political institutions established among them; and that the human mind, whenever it is placed in the same situation, will, in ages the most distant, and in countries the most remote, assume the same form, and be distinguished by the same manners. (2:376)

These passages serve to point out how clearly Robertson could express the complicated visions of his friends. It is unfair to Robertson, however, to see him merely as an elegant mouthpiece for the views of others. The development of his thought throughout his work is so marked, that he must be given credit for considerable originality of historical conception.

This can be seen in the unfolding of Robertson's views on utility, and his integrating these into a form of universal

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[33]Ferguson, *Essay*, 188.

history which could instruct the present. The whole structure possessed its own dignity and substance, which included the simplest manifestations of human culture as well as the exploits of monarchs. In place of a generalised *Esprit des Lois*, or *Wealth of Nations*, Robertson studied to meet the challenge of Montesquieu and Smith by interpreting the politics of modern Europe using their methods. The balance of power seemed to be an established fact. Robertson tried to explain why this was so. In his works on America and India, part of his purpose was to elucidate current colonial practices and give guidance as to how these could be improved. Contrary to the economic thrust of Smith, Robertson saw this in human as well as commercial terms. His indignation was equally directed at the physical abuse of Indians, both in America and in India, and at wasteful financial habits. Robertson was issuing a warning about the possible misuse of the implications of the stadial theory by Europeans in imposing their cultural biases on other nations. In spite of the interest shown by many Scots in Orientalism in the following years, Robertson's fears were realised in the continuing activities of Scots such as Archibald Dalzel, and in the influential writings of James Mill on India.[34]

Pure reason was an important principle for Robertson, as it was to most *philosophes*, but his belief in it was qualified by

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[34]Jane Rendall, "Scottish Orientalism: from Robertson to James Mill", *Historical Journal* 25 (1982), 43-69.

his historical research. Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* has been called a time bomb "ticking away underneath" the Scottish Enlightenment.[35] Hume's belief that causation was only an impression was not generally accepted by Robertson or the rest of his circle. In his interpretation of history, however, Robertson gave credence to a measure of irrationality in political affairs. The Scottish theory of Spontaneous Order and the Law of Unintended Consequences are clear in his writings. Robertson's history is further complicated by his acceptance of a Mandevillean[36] belief in good emerging from evil.[37] Actions have results which have no proportion to their causes, and events produce changes which no man could have conceived or directed.[38] Thus reason must always be modified by the sense of the unpredictability of any chain of events. Robertson justified this sense to himself by his occasional insertions of comments on God's purpose in the world. There is every reason to suppose that his belief was sincerely held. The total nature of his religious commitment excluded any other point of view. For Robertson, however, as

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[35]Lenman, *Ingegration*, 25.

[36]Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), Dutch-born physician and author, who settled in London in 1692. *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices Publick Benefits*, (1714) was a commentary on Mandeville's poem, *The Grumbling Hive*, an allegory about the economic usefulness to society of vice.

[37]See Felix Gilbert, in "Introduction" to the *Progress of Society*, ix.

[38]E.g. The Crusades changed European society (2:14); Protestant martyrs strengthened the Reformed religion (3:30).

a scientific historian, it was necessary to state premises, the explanation for which did not demand miracles. To other clergymen such as Wesley, his total picture was a bleak one which denied Divine intervention in the world.

In coming to grips with the unpredictability of political history, Robertson began to take the longer view and to explore the wide range of societies created by man. To his linear, spontaneously organized picture of institutions, he added the theory of categorization through modes of subsistence. Primitive man, free, independent and equal, possessed nothing, therefore had no need for government. Men in a pastoral stage had some form of property. Agriculturalists had more, and with a settled community, needed basic governing bodies to ensure the safety of their belongings and their lives. With acquired needs, came industry and barter, leading to a full commercial society. Freedom from want led to a desire for independence from despotic authority. This was particularly encouraged by the liberal ideas produced by the Reformation. Robertson interwove these ideas into his narrative to create a new anthropological form of historical writing. He explored the abundant interconnections which he found. In England, Tudor policies and the dissolution of the monasteries brought about a redistribution of landed property, with a consequent gain in power to the Commons. Reformed religion and liberty were two waves of the same tide which empowered the people;

> Power and influence accompanied of course the property which they acquired. They rose to consideration among their fellow subjects; they began to feel their own importance; and extending their influence in the legislative body gradually, and often when neither they themselves nor others foresaw all the effects of their claims and pretensions, they at last attained that high authority to which the British constitution is indebted for the existence, and must owe the preservation, of its liberty. (2:365)

The cultural mosaic of any nation contained innumerable pieces which formed the total pattern. That of each state was different, even if many of the components were similar. England, France and Spain progressed along individual paths after the sixteenth century because of those differences. The final result was a modern world of order and balance. Order and balance as they were represented in Scotland in a Moderate Church and in a society with organized ranks, in the Union in the British constitution, and abroad in the states-system of Europe.

The commerce which flowed across national borders in this rational world led to international understanding and goodwill. Consensus, as a basis for settlement of dispute, was always best. War, while sometimes unavoidable, was always undesirable because of the suffering which it created. Robertson believed that, fortunately, the world had changed for the better. In the past, war had been "accompanied with horrible devastations, and an incredible destruction of the human species"; in the eighteenth century, things were different:

> Civilized nations, which take arms upon cool

> reflection, from motives of policy or prudence, with a view to guard against some distant danger, or to prevent some remote contingency, carry on their hostilities with so little rancour or animosity, that war among them is disarmed of half its terrors. (2:9)

Or, as he said more succinctly in the *History of America*, "The savage fights to destroy, the citizen to conquer" (1:230). Robertson considered that commercial and political institutions shaped the character of human beings. Similar institutions would thus produce citizens who reacted in similar ways to their environment. He believed that understanding this could also ease international tensions. Commerce was conducive to peace in his opinion. (2:32)

The character of the historian which emerged from a study of his works was strongly utilitarian. Robertson's motivation in writing was probably many-facetted. He had time to spare; he genuinely enjoyed the studious life; he was following the normal path for a scholarly clergyman in publishing his researches; he was making a comfortable amount of extra income. One motive perhaps superseded the others: writing history was a useful task, which would benefit future generations. His friends and mentors all agreed on the utility of history as a guide for the future, a lesson to governors, a model for young people. The "science of man" was something from which all could learn. As a minister, Robertson was said to preach well, but normally on moral, rather than theological topics. In the *History of Charles V*, Robertson said that he would leave any dogmatic discussion of

the issues of the Reformation to scholars in theology. That he avoided it in his preaching is not therefore surprising. He was a man who could always see both sides of a debate. In his histories, his practice was to state both cases, and to leave the reader to make his own decision as to the stronger. In an eighteenth century pulpit, such latitude would not be allowed. This lack of dogmatism was especially evident in the *History of America*, where Robertson went considerably beyond the parameters which he had hitherto set for himself. To rules about causation he added "a sharpened sensitivity to the often wonderful individual facts which comprise the past."[39] He formed a bridge between Voltaire and Ranke in his outlook on the history of mankind.

Perhaps because of this outlook, Robertson held some radical notions for his class, in spite of his acceptance of "polished" society and the subordination of ranks which that implied. His reputation for this must have been established as early as 1763, when Boswell recounted a conversation with Dr.Johnson at which social levelling was mentioned. Johnson said "Suppose a shoemaker should claim an equality with Dr. Robertson, as he does with a lord. How would the Doctor stare. 'But, Sir,' says the shoemaker, 'I do great service to society. . . . for mankind could do better without your history than without my shoes.'"[40] Robertson's 1788

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[39]Womersley, "Historical Writings of Robertson", 506.

[40]Boswell, *London Journal*, 320.

forecast of affairs in France has been mentioned. To the conservative Carlyle, "Robertson was warpd by the Spirit of Party, and so much Dazzled by the Splendor of the French Revolution, That even his Sagacity was Impos'd on, and he Could not Listen to the Ravings of Burke as he Call'd them."[41]

Robertson might have approved in principle of possible changes in the organization of society, but only if they did not impair the order which he saw as essential. He had stressed in the *Reasons for Dissent* that men joined in society to gain advantages. A balance must be kept between individual rights and the necessary subordination of all to maintain those rights. For him the best way to keep a personal balance was to stay outside the formal party system. Clark has suggested that Robertson's retirement from the General Assembly in 1780, which has never been satisfactorily explained, might have been because of his "refusal to abandon his political independence and commit himself to the political orbit of Henry Dundas."[42]

Ties to the world of politics may have been disliked by Robertson, but personal ties to his colleagues were another matter. Solid relationships with men of like mind were absolutely vital to his generation of Scots. The pleasure

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[41]Carlyle, *Anecdotes*, 281.

[42]Ian D. L. Clark, "From Protest to Reaction", in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement*, eds. Phillipson and Mitchison, 211.

with which Hume wrote to Robertson, or Smith, when their books did well in London, spoke for the solidarity of their friendships. European literary circles were small and close-knit. The Scottish group was unusually so, and was admired for this by the French, who called Hume "le bon David" for his attitude to other writers. Their mutual support never failed, and was probably the reason why Hume was so incredulous about Rousseau's apparent ingratitude.[43] He had not realised that a fellow writer could behave in that way. Personal jealousies occasionally caused wounded feelings or minor accusations of plagiarism from touchy writers such as Smith. On the whole, however, the Scots were amazingly united. Robertson was the premier historian amongst them; they were proud of his accomplishments, and he, in turn, appreciated the greater talents which he recognised. He created readable, lasting history from the ideas which he thus received, and provided the groundwork to carry British historiography into the nineteenth century.

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[43]Hume befriended Rousseau in 1766, and brought him to England. George III was requested to give the Frenchman a pension, and agreed. Rousseau, who suffered from a persecution complex, became suspicious of the motives of all concerned, and refused the money. He eventually returned to France to Hume's relief, but the break between the two men was permanent.

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